

NETWORKING CREATIVE MISSIONAL MINISTRIES IN A
RURAL, POST-CHRISTIAN SETTING

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BY
TIMOTHY W. FRISCH

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ABSTRACT

The thesis of this project was that the church in the Claremont, NH region would have greater missional impact by utilizing four strategies, which include incubating mission, inspiring cooperation, incorporating contextualization, and increasing multiplication. These strategies were implemented through the efforts of the Connect Center ministry in Claremont, which worked with various churches and outreach ministries. The impact was measured qualitatively and quantitatively by analyzing feedback from leaders who were part of the networking activity of this project and documenting the overall number of gospel-sharing ministries and the attendance trend of evangelical ministry in Claremont, NH.

CHAPTER ONE

FOUR MISSIONAL CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Introduction

As a nineteen-year-old Joan Rosenberg was told by a fellow camp counselor, “You know what? You’re boring.” She says it was a gut-punch moment. It hurt to hear such a critical comment, but it ultimately became the catalyst for her to study and end up helping people working through unpleasant feelings. She turned criticism into positive action.¹ Very often, when we receive negative feedback, it is easy to respond with discouragement or defensiveness, but the fact is that truthful critique, though hard to hear, can actually spur us on to much-needed action and to accomplish feats we would otherwise never consider.

The church in upper New England is facing a gut-punch moment. There are many sincere believers who deeply love the Lord, but sadly, the church is not living up to her full potential. Upper New England is known as being the epicenter of two spiritual awakenings in this country, but today it is hard to believe that this was once a place of spiritual vitality. The church has been in decline due to factors both from inside and outside of the church community. The church has perhaps bought into the lie that it is ineffective and insufficient to address the realities of the culture today. But God sees and says otherwise. Jesus, with sovereign power over the forces of darkness, is building His church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail over what He intends to accomplish.

1. Joan Rosenberg, “Emotional Mastery: The Gifted Wisdom of Unpleasant Feelings” (TEDx Santa Barbara Presentation, September 2016. Accessed July 2017 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKy19WzkPxE>).

In order to re-establish initiative and insight for missional impact and to follow Jesus in building His kingdom, the church must take an honest look at the realities of the present culture and how it is responding. It must consider what missionary response God is calling His people to today in order to bring the gospel to bear in this particular time and place. And it must determine to engage obediently in practices that will fulfill its primary mission of making disciples of Jesus.

In contemplation of these goals, this chapter will outline four problems related to missional impact in upper New England, provide four missional principles in response to these problems, summarize a strategic approach for mission in the present New England context, and finally, present a hypothesis of the potentially effective outcomes of this new ministry concept. Note that the term *missional* is used to describe effective outreach ministry in this project. The term *missional* may be defined as that which characterizes ministry as being on mission, which is defined by Christ in the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:18–20). Missional describes ministry that embodies the mission of God (*missio Dei*) in a world that does not acknowledge His presence or recognize His rightful authority. The ideal missional approach is observed in Christ in His incarnation (God’s presence manifested) where He preached the gospel and displayed the good work of God’s kingdom in the world.²

The Present Cultural Realities of Upper New England

The first step toward the church reaching its full missional potential is to do an honest assessment of the mission field in which God has placed it and also evaluate the response it is

2. For a detailed discussion of the term *missional*, cf. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 251–260.

having in regard to these present cultural realities. There are four problems that must be considered in order to get a clear picture of the situation.

1. The Trend toward Secularization

The first reality is how unchurched and unreached is this particular region of the country. Many people perceive this in a general manner, but the numbers give a better sense of the situation. In 2012, Gallup reported “The 12 least religious states comprise the entirety of New England.”³ According to Pew Research, presently Maine and Vermont are tied for 48th, and New Hampshire and Massachusetts are tied for 50th among all the states for how religious they are based on four factors: 1.) how important they say religion is in their lives, 2.) whether or not they attend worship services weekly, 3.) how often they pray, and 4.) whether or not they believe in God with absolute certainty (see charts in Appendix A). And not surprisingly, among all of the states, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine have the lowest church attendance, with 17%, 20%, and 20% church attendance respectively.⁴

What this data indicates is that this region of the country is particularly non-religious. This research lines up with what the Barna group has found. They provide a list of the most post-Christian cities (based on sixteen factors) and have revealed that five of the top six are located in New England (see chart in Appendix B).

3. Frank Newport, “Mississippi Maintains Hold as Most Religious U.S. State” (Accessed July 2017; available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/160415/mississippi-maintains-hold-religious-state.aspx>).

4. Frank Newport, “Frequent Church Attendance Highest in Utah, Lowest in Vermont” (Accessed July 2017; available at http://www.gallup.com/poll/181601/frequent-church-attendance-highest-utah-lowest-vermont.aspx?utm_source=Social%20Issues&utm_medium=newsfeed&utm_campaign=tiles).

Barna Group's research has also shown that on a national scale, generationally there is a trend away from Christian beliefs, with the Elder generation at 28%, the Boomers at 35%, the Busters at 40%, and the Mosaics at 48% post-Christian in outlook. The amount of de-churched and purely unchurched individuals in the U.S. has gone from 30% in the 1990s to 43% in 2014.⁵

The overall picture, then, is that the country is becoming more secularized, and New England is at the forefront of this trend. For those living in upper New England, it is easy to recognize that many people have a diminishing connection with church and a growing percentage do not operate within a biblical worldview.

2. *The Lack of Gospel Ministry*

On the other side of the coin of increased secularism is the lack of gospel ministry in this region. This is not to say there are not many good gospel ministries, but their number and present impact is highly overshadowed by the overall characteristics and cultural trends of this area. For example, in Claremont, NH (the place of this writer's ministry context), there are presently five gospel preaching churches (a higher amount in relation to the population than many other towns in New England), but they only reach less than ten percent of the population. The total population is 13,000 residents, and an estimated 1,500 people (generously speaking) attend church regularly. This means that 11,500 are not presently connected to any church ministry, and this is one of the more spiritually vibrant scenarios found in upper New England.

Not only are there few gospel ministries in relation to the population and geographical area of Upper New England, but the ministries themselves are quite isolated and are thus in a weakened

5. George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, Kindle Ed., 2014), chart at loc. 179.

state. The small population size and isolated nature of New England ministry often means that churches are under-resourced and unable to pay for full time staff. One story is told of a high-profile worship leader who came to Vermont to talk to ministry leaders. A pastor in attendance asked a question about conducting ministry in his setting. The worship leader asked who the staff person in charge of connections is, and the pastor replied that he is the only staff person (and part time at that). This is a very common scenario for ministries in rural, upper New England. This under-resourcing can leave even great gospel-oriented ministry leaders demoralized, discouraged, and pre-disposed toward burnout. According to an organization hosting pastors retreats in upper New England, the number of pastors leaving ministry in New England discouraged was at 50% when they began hosting retreats.⁶ Their ministry has helped significantly, but the numbers are indicative of the challenging nature of this setting.

A final point about the lack of gospel ministry in upper New England is that the most vibrant and growing churches are reaching a demographic that is not necessarily characteristic of all of the people in the region, and they do not have systems for permeating the more rural areas with the gospel. The most quickly growing churches are in higher population areas where they are able to conduct stage-based, “come and see” ministry. But there are many locations in upper New England where this would not be feasible due to a low, spread-out population. Furthermore, there are people who are not drawn to a type of environment that is high energy and performance-oriented. And finally, these churches, even if successful, are adding to their numbers on a level that cannot keep up with the spiritual needs of the region. On a national level, missiologists have indicated that church-

6. Phil Waldrep Ministries (Accessed August 2016; available at <http://encouragementretreat.org/about/>).

planting would need to increase five-fold to make advances from our current status,⁷ and as shown above, New England is in the most highly unreached part of the country. Therefore, even as some ministries grow and flourish, many communities will continue to be bereft of vibrant gospel ministry, and the overall spiritual condition of this region will remain unhealthy.

3. The High Needs of the Region and Low Amount of Resources

Aside from the lack of gospel ministry, the other side of the balance contains the vast physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the population, which is not surprising considering how little the gospel is permeating the region. One example of the needs is the current drug use epidemic. According to most recent statistics, the amount of drug overdose deaths in New Hampshire has tripled from 2010 to 2016 (see charts in Appendix C).⁸ In Vermont, prescription drug overdose deaths increased from 66 to 104 from 2015 to 2016, and heroin deaths nearly doubled in that same timespan.⁹ Tragically, the city of Brattleboro, VT reported 11 deaths in one day of July 2017.¹⁰ Drug abuse and overdose is a significant and growing problem.

Widespread drug use and the resulting consequences are having a serious effect on the communities of upper New England. Sometimes but not always connected to drug use are other

7. J. D. Greear and Mike McDaniel, *Sending Capacity, Not Seating Capacity: Why a Church Gains the Most when It Sends Its Best* (eBook; available at <https://exponential.org/resource-ebooks/sending-capacity/>; Exponential Resources, 2015), chapter 5.

8. New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, “Drug Environment Report” (Accessed July 2017; available at <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/data.htm>).

9. Associated Press Report, “Heroin, Prescription Drug Overdose Deaths Spike in Vermont” (Accessed November 2017; available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/vermont/articles/2017-03-07/heroin-prescription-drug-overdose-deaths-spike-in-vermont>).

10. Susan Smallheer, “Brattleboro: 11 Overdoses in One Day” (Accessed November 2017; available at <https://www.timesargus.com/articles/brattleboro-11-overdoses-in-one-day/>).

social problems plaguing the region. For example, in regard to children in need of permanent families, the Children Welfare League of America states:

- 120 children were legally adopted through a public child welfare agency in New Hampshire in 2014, increasing 9.1% from 110 in 2013.
- Of the 885 children in out-of-home care in 2014, there were 159 or 18% waiting to be adopted.

The number of children in need of permanent families is increasing, and the present needs are already exceeding the resources available. 18% of children in out-of-home care were still in need of adoptive families in 2014.

Another issue is homelessness. According to the New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness:

- Median gross rents rose at twice the pace of median household renter incomes, narrowing an already scarce market of affordable housing.
- Vacancy rates are decreasing to alarmingly low levels across New Hampshire, with the state average falling from 2.5 percent in 2014 to 2.2 percent in 2015. A healthy vacancy rate is normally around five percent.
- The average real income of working poor people, defined as the mean income of households in poverty who worked at least 27 weeks during a given year, increased by 24 percent during the last year of the most available data; however, this level of income clearly cannot sustain any rental housing in New Hampshire.¹¹

11. New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness, “The State of Homelessness in New Hampshire” (Accessed August 2016; available at <https://www.nhceh.org/wp-content/uploads/reports/2015-report.pdf>).

In looking at the statistics on drug use, child welfare, and homelessness, it must be remembered that these are merely indicators of a deeper problem—the spiritual depletion of upper New England. At one time, this region had a thriving church setting and a greater social health. The trend toward secularism and the lack of gospel ministry have largely set the stage for these social ills, since spiritual emptiness ultimately bears fruit in all sorts of social difficulties and consequences. This is demonstrated by Professor Alvin Reid in his book on evangelism as he relates the following story:

In Claremont, NH I met Eileen, an apartment finder for the town. I asked her, “You know the area well; what is the greatest need?” Immediately, she said, “There is a lot of hopelessness out there.” I handed her a tract that said “Here’s Hope” on the cover (*that* got her attention!). I told her, “We are here to tell others of the hope of Jesus.” She was a recovering alcoholic and said she did more counseling than apartment finding.¹²

Stephen Witmer aptly assesses the underlying problem of rural communities in his book *A Big Gospel in Small Places*. He says,

The problems faced by people in small places are partly our own doing, owing to our own depravity. People are sinful wherever they live. It’s important to acknowledge that small places are worse than we think not simply because of the social ills there but because of the people there. A robust doctrine of sin reminds us of that.

But it’s not as simple as saying country problems are due to sin. Beneath small place struggles is a potent mix of sin and despair, culpability and hopelessness.¹³

This is the reality of places like upper New England that are facing the results of spiritual depletion. Churches that do reach out can easily get maxed out in this environment of high needs and limited resources. The fact that many churches are working independently of each other only exacerbates the difficulty. After all, even with a church that is highly gifted and resourced, how much can one church handle on its own?

12. Alvin Reid, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 193.

13. Stephen Witmer, *A Big Gospel in Small Places: Why Ministry in Forgotten Communities Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 73.

Clearly, the vast spiritual and physical needs of the culture continue to far exceed the current resources provided by churches at this point in time.

4. *The Disconnect of the Church and the Culture*

Not only are the present needs of the culture enormous, but there is also a prevalent disconnect between the church and the culture in which it resides. The first disconnect has to do with *awareness*. Churches may be unaware of the needs of people in the community or only have a vague sense of problems. For example, in relation to the statistics presented above, people in the church may realize that the region has some problems with drugs, but they may not realize that drug overdose deaths have tripled in the past several years and that there were around 540 deaths that occurred in NH alone in 2016 due to drug overdose (see Appendix C). That is more than one death per day in this relatively low population state.

The second disconnect has to do with *action*. Even if people in churches are aware of the problems, they may be at a loss as to how to meet the vast needs. Presently, the drug treatment availability is limited, the foster care system is overloaded, and the homeless shelters are unable to accommodate all of those in need. If government-resourced programs cannot even handle the present demand of services for these issues, then how can certain individuals in a church possibly feel equipped to tackle the challenges? The needs are just too immense and overwhelming to even know where to begin. And this is not just in terms of physical needs, but also the emotional and spiritual needs that are closely related.

The final disconnect is in the arena of *accessibility*. Even if churches do have some resources (though admittedly limited), they may find it very difficult to make those resources accessible to the community. Perhaps the churches are so far removed from the culture in which

they reside that people in the community are basically unaware of what they are able to offer. Many people feel uncomfortable going to a church even to acquire much-needed resources because of bad experiences, misconceptions, or a lack of trust fostered by the current cultural milieu.

Adding to these difficulties is that fact that a lot of church ministry practices tend to reach church people and are failing to tap widely into the unchurched culture. They may feel they are making great progress in ministry because there are many people coming to church, but there is a large segment of the population with which their ministries are not connecting, as highlighted in the work by Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson in *On the Verge*. Many contemporary church practices are reaching people within the “red ocean” (the target group over which existing churches are competing), but there is still a “blue ocean” of 60% of the population that is still disconnected from present church ministry practices.¹⁴

Barriers between Church and Culture

The disconnect between church and culture is greater than many realize. To paint a clearer picture of the situation, it is helpful to see the details of what contributes to this disconnect. The following material will outline and briefly discuss the barriers on the culture’s side as well as the church’s side that can make ministering the gospel challenging. The lists are derived from various written works related to the church in culture, some data collected from a questionnaire for individuals, discussions with pastors of three fast-growing churches in upper New England,¹⁵ and personal analysis based on living in Claremont, NH for over 15 years.

14. Alan Hirsch and David Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Kindle Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), loc. 289–334.

15. See Appendix D for the questionnaire as well as church leader questions used for analysis. Several individuals filled out an online version of the questionnaire using Google forms. The leaders interviewed in this project

Barriers on the Culture's Side

This part of the analysis will list barriers on the side of those who are outside of the church, whether they are unchurched (individuals who have never been a part of a church community) or de-churched (have left involvement in church life).

Barrier 1: Burned by Past Church Experience

Some individuals have a barrier between them and church, not because they have never been to church but because they *have* been to church and have had a negative experience. Sometimes it is not fundamentally the fault of the church. The person who feels hurt may have reacted wrongly to other church members' behavior because of their own weaknesses, but even in these instances it is wise for churches to examine their attitudes and actions, to know if they are operating out of sincere love for Christ and others. Furthermore, there are certainly many instances where people's grievances with the church are valid, such as when a church leader has succumbed to marital infidelity. The Scripture teaches the importance of being blameless (Phil. 2:15) and how professing believers' inconsistency can actually be a cause for blaspheming among outsiders (Rom. 2:24).

Barrier 2: Church Perceived as Very Negative

"Too negative" is one of the descriptions given about churches in response to our questionnaire.¹⁶ Churches (especially evangelical) can be known more for what they are against (abortion, gay rights, etc.) than what they are for. This is due partly to the "culture wars" and media

included pastors from Lake Church in Newport, NH, Riverbank Church in White River Jct., VT, and Rutland City Church (now Mission City Church) in Rutland, VT. These leaders were personally interviewed for relevant feedback.

16. Timothy Frisch, "Opinions about Church" Questionnaire, conducted in June 2016.

attention given to evangelical positions and political efforts. However, Christians are to some degree culpable for this perception because of how they communicate about cultural issues and fail to listen well to those who think differently. A tremendous example of the power of listening and relating is in the book *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, where Rosaria Butterfield recounts how she went from being a lesbian LGBT activist in the 1990s to a Christian and pastor's wife today. The starting point for her spiritual revolution came through a Presbyterian pastor who did not attack her but invited her to dinner with him and his wife, befriended her, and patiently explained God's truth to her.¹⁷

Barrier 3: Division in the Church

"Too many denominations" is another description given in response to our questionnaire.¹⁸ The issue of so many different kinds of churches is understandably perplexing and problematic to those outside of church. In a generation that increasingly values tolerance and advocates collaboration over competition, churches combatting and competing seems antithetical to what they profess to be about. Also, it appears to some that churches are self-interested in building their own achievements rather than serving a higher, nobler purpose.

Barrier 4: Churches Perceived as Self-Seeking

Sometimes the church puts off the image that it is trying to get things from people rather than give. This is where an idea like the one sparked by pastor J. D. Greear is helpful. He asked his church if the community at large would weep if their church were gone. The church realized the

17. Cf. Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2012).

18. Timothy Frisch, "Opinions about Church" Questionnaire, conducted in June 2016.

community would not be sad and proceeded to reach out to the community by helping with an underperforming local school. It made a deep impact on the school and showed the community that the church was not about taking but interested in giving. One teacher in the school said to the pastor, “I have always known you Christians believed you should love your neighbor. . . I’ve never known what it looked like until now.”¹⁹

Barrier 5: Churches Seen as Untrustworthy

Churches can potentially be seen as cultic groups that are intent on indoctrinating and controlling people with strange or even dangerous teaching. It must be admitted that there always have been and still are groups like this, and the church must be patient in understanding this sentiment but also seeking to dispel it by example.

Barrier 6: Church’s Views Are Out of Step

Because the present-day authoritative foundation of the culture rests in science-based fields of knowledge, many people have a hard time accepting certain teachings of Scripture. They can be quite critical of Christian teachings about origins and sexual ethics because they are so different than the common notions proposed in the mainstream, secular arena. Christians can be seen as a laughingstock and primitive in their understanding because of their belief in the Scripture. The New Atheists like Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens have reinforced this sentiment in their widely read books, and debates such as the one between Bill Nye and Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis have been used to reinforce the idea that Christians are backward and opposed to science and progress.

19. J.D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 236–238.

Barrier 7: Competing and Varied Spiritual Belief Systems

Pluralism permeates the mood of today's culture. This is understandable considering the highly varied belief systems within the U.S. population as well as the accessibility of vast amounts of information available through television and the internet. The idea that one group has a corner on truth appears untenable in light of so many opposing viewpoints and the limitations of the human mind.

Barrier 8: Negative View toward Scripture

People may have negative views about Scriptural teachings for various reasons, such as a perceived contradiction with science, conflict between biblical morals and present social norms, or people's misuse of Scripture in a hurtful manner. Some of these issues cannot be fully dealt with until a person is given a change of perspective by the Holy Spirit (cf. I Cor. 2:14). However, the church should take care to recognize the potential for unnecessarily offending people by not taking the time to listen to those outside the church and patiently explain the reasoning behind biblical teachings that are unpalatable to our cultural sensitivities.

Barrier 9: Self-help and Personal Spirituality Are Preferred

Barna's research indicates that many unchurched in the United States are not opposed to spirituality, but they prefer a personal pursuit rather than organized religion.²⁰ Self-help and spiritual improvement books are very popular and offer people a way to experience a form of faith apart from church. Therefore, one challenge for the church is that many feel it is unnecessary for a person's spiritual understanding and well-being.

20. E.g. George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Culture and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014) Chapters 4 and 5.

Barrier 10: Family Background in or Attachment to Certain Denomination

For some individuals, the barrier to attending a church may be that their own background is of a certain group or denomination, and they are wary of stepping outside of their background or feel that their own denominational ties are satisfactory and should not be compromised.

To some degree, these barriers indicate misperceptions people have, which merely need to be corrected by relational interaction with healthy church members. Other barriers are related to the fact that many individuals are not believers and do not have a spiritual appreciation or understanding of certain aspects of church. For example, they may disagree with the teaching of God's punishment for sin, but this would only be remedied when they come to a spiritual understanding of sin and the nature of God Himself. Some barriers, however, are valid criticisms of the church that must be humbly considered by Christians who want to represent Christ faithfully to those outside. This leads to the second part of the analysis, which will list barriers and challenges on the side of the church.

Barriers on the Church's Side

As real and problematic as the barriers on the culture's side are, the barriers on the church's side are even more significant. Therefore, it is vital for the church to consider its own weaknesses and challenges in regard to penetrating the culture with the gospel and determine practical changes that need to be made.

Barrier 1: Seen as Liberal to be Culturally Engaged

For some churches, the idea of doing good within the community is associated with the social gospel. Some feel that meeting physical needs is abandoning the call to meet the spiritual

need for salvation. Some things to consider in relation to this is that Jesus certainly met physical needs as He proclaimed the gospel and way of salvation. Also, there are many examples of ministers who have a biblical theology that demonstrates both in theory and in action how doing good in the community relates to the gospel. For instance, Robert Lupton's book on community development, *Compassion, Justice, and the Christian Life* highlights how sharing spiritual salvation should not preclude caring for the community. He states, "When we skip over the Great Commandment on the way to fulfilling the Great Commission, we do great harm to the authenticity of the faith."²¹

Barrier 2: Anti-works Theology

A related item to the previous point is that many evangelical churches emphasize the point that salvation is not of works (which is true!) to the point that Christians feel no need to pursue good works. However, Paul describes the people of Christ as being zealous for good works (Titus 2:14), and the writer of Hebrews exhorts Christians to stir each other up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Barrier 3: Not Preaching and Teaching the Gospel

Sadly, there are people who attest to having gone to church for many years and never having heard the gospel. If the church is not clearly articulating the gospel and inviting people to place their whole trust in Christ, the lost will not be reached, and that church will likely die out over time.

21. Robert D. Lupton, *Compassion, Justice, and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Kindle Ed., 2007), loc. 161.

Barrier 4: Not Being Perceptive or Sympathetic toward People's Needs

When Christians look at certain non-Christians, they can potentially have the attitude of the Pharisees who saw many individuals as “sinners,” as though they themselves were not. The problem with this mentality is that it often leads to faulting people rather than relating to people. Jesus was charged as being a friend of sinners (cf. Matt. 11:19), so the church should have no problem befriending and helping those who are entangled in sin.

Barrier 5: Becoming Overly Academic

Many churches largely utilize a classroom format. One potential problem is using highly academic methods in a demographic that is not very interested or oriented toward academics. This makes it hard for those who are not avid readers or who do not do well in classroom environments to feel they can be a vital part of church life, or they may be completely disengaged from what the church is offering. Also, becoming overly academic is foreign to the methods Jesus used to train his disciples. He did teach them knowledge but His training of them was very hands on as well.

Barrier 6: Being Focused on Large Ministry

The ideal for churches today seems to be as large as possible. While very large churches can be a benefit to the culture and church at large, there are potential side effects of only focusing on large ministry, such as portraying that a smaller church is a failure, not producing material to guide and encourage small church staff, or not establishing strategies for small church planting and multiplication in low population areas.

Barrier 7: Being Inward Focused Rather than Missional

Churches will often start off with an outward focus, but after about five years, the focus begins to turn toward the membership itself rather than the lost.²² This could be for a couple of reasons, such as the legitimate need to care for the established membership or because there is a growing satisfaction with the present state of the church.

Barrier 8: Accommodating Only a Churched Subculture

An often unconscious barrier between church and culture is that because many churches are composed of a certain subculture, the church often does things in a way that relates (culturally and stylistically) to their own people. For example, the preaching and teaching may include topics that relate to long-time church members but in no way relate to the typical unchurched person. The language used at church may make total sense to those who are on the inside but may be very foreign to those who have had little to no exposure to the Bible and Christianity.

Barrier 9: Using Tools and Ideas Designed for a Different Demographic

A lot of tools and materials are developed by certain churches in particular areas. The tools may be usable and helpful to some degree in regions like upper New England, but they must be adapted in order to effectively fit the cultural context. As an example, the music worship materials and methods being produced are often geared toward areas where it is possible to achieve a concert style environment, but in small town New England churches, the approach to music needs to be adapted (perhaps using similar music but with more of an acoustic, intimate concert feel). In some cases, the culture actually prefers a more traditional feel to church, while much of the material is advocating a very contemporary feel.

22. Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?: Leading Change in the Church*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 90.

Barrier 10: Using Literary Tools in a Visual Culture; Using Propositional Concepts in a Story-Oriented Culture

So much of outreach material is presented in reading format, but the culture is becoming increasingly visual and non-literary based. This is not to say that people should not be expected to read at all, but it is wise to make use of video and storytelling in a culture that rests upon these means for assimilating information.

Barrier 11: Division in the Church

This barrier was seen from the culture's side as well, but one problem the church still faces is its divided state. While some division will always be a reality, it should never be the ideal. If we cannot get along with other brothers and sisters in Christ who are not exactly like us, it will greatly impede our efforts to cooperate and reach out to a world that is even less like us.

Barrier 12: Being More Program (Event) Oriented than People Oriented

Churches have a tendency to think if they build it, people will come. However, even if you build a baseball stadium, only those interested in baseball and in a particular team will initially come. People do not come merely because of an event but because of a personal connection. One response from effective church leaders in upper New England was that people are coming to their church because friends and family invite them.²³

23. Timothy Frisch, "Church Leader Survey" conducted in June–July of 2016.

Barrier 13: Being Apathetic and Defeatist about Cultural Situation

A huge barrier to reaching the culture within the church may be summed up in the word apathy. Perhaps members are fine with the church the way it is or feel that it is not worth reaching out to a culture that is so morally degraded.

Barrier 14: Church is Spiritually Anemic and Lethargic

Related to the previous barrier, the church's apathy toward evangelism may be indicative of spiritual apathy in general. Churches can become spiritually anemic and lethargic over time, and the need for revitalization becomes paramount. Jesus told the church at Ephesus that they needed to get back to the passionate love they had for Him at the beginning (Rev. 2:4–5).

Understanding the barriers outlined above will cultivate awareness for how the church can better engage with the culture in which it resides. These concepts are not meant to belittle or fail to acknowledge that there are many great efforts that Christians are making to reach upper New England with the gospel. Nevertheless, the reality of how much of an unreached people group this region of the country has become begs for God's people to seriously examine how they can be better missionaries. Considering these barriers is the beginning of reflection and evaluation for future endeavors, but most importantly, it is a call for God's missionary people to seek a work that only God can do both within and outside the walls of churches.

The four cultural realities outlined above paint a bleak picture for the ability of the church to engage the needs of the culture. But as said at the outset, a gut-punch assessment can be a catalyst for self-reflection and positive action. The following section will present four responses for a missional outlook on which to build an optimistic but also realistic strategy for optimal impact in this vastly unchurched region of the United States.

The Missional Foundation for Engaging the Unchurched Culture

Before delving into a strategy for missional impact, the first step is to lay a foundation for missional engagement. This foundation is a response to the present cultural realities, but even more fundamentally, a call for the church to examine its own state of operation and the impact this is having on the current situation. This will lay important groundwork and a rationale for the missional strategy utilized in this project. There are four principles of this missional foundation, and they are based on the overarching example of Jesus and the early church which, while meeting physical needs, revealed the fundamental spiritual need underlying the condition of humans and showed how this is ultimately addressed through Christ's work on their behalf.

Response 1: Being on Mission

In response to the trend toward secularization, it is imperative that the church be on mission. Jesus gave the church clear marching orders, which was to be witnesses of Him throughout the earth with the promise that He would be with His people until the end of the age (cf. Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18–20). There are two key ideas for mission to become a major focus and effective ministry of the church—being on mission through spiritual emphasis and renewal and being on mission through effective gospel communication.

Through Spiritual Emphasis and Renewal

Since the marginalization of the church and the growth of secularism are related to a spiritual battle, the church must begin with a spiritual emphasis. The apostle Paul states, “For though we live in the body, we do not wage war in an unspiritual way, since the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds” (II Cor. 10:3–4; HCSB). The church must experience renewal and be filled with power from on high if it is

going to possess the heartfelt desire to display and proclaim the gospel and penetrate the spiritual strongholds that exist in New England.

Evangelism professor Alvin Reid aptly summarizes a spiritual emphasis in reaching the culture with three words. *The Fuel* is the Holy Spirit which is the necessary power for accomplishing God's purposes. *The Fire* is prayer. *The vessel* is the holy life of a believer who shares and exemplifies the gospel.²⁴

The church must be "rekindled with fire from above," as the old song says. The transformation of the culture by the gospel begins with a transformation of the church through the gospel. It is encouraging to note that during the time of this writing there are signs of renewal in the church. Ruth Graham, contributor to *Slate* magazine, has written an article subtitled "How Church-Planting and Music Festivals Are Bringing about a Quiet Revival," which outlines new works taking root through "church-planting organizations and conferences, college campus ministries, and public events like Christian music festivals"²⁵ There is no doubt that this is a unique time as God is sending new laborers into the harvest, as seen for example in the establishment of a new Christian College in Bennington, VT,²⁶ which prays regularly for each town in Vermont and is seeking to plant new churches and renew existing ones. The NETS Center for Church Planting and Revitalization,²⁷ founded in Williston, VT, has been steadily growing and recently purchased a large

24. Alvin L. Reid, *Radically Unchurched: Who They Are and How to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 44–53.

25. Ruth Graham, "Re-evangelizing New England, How Church-Planting and Music Festivals Are Bringing about a Quiet Revival (Accessed July 2016; available at http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2012/11/re-evangelizing_new_england_how_church_planting_and_music_festivals_are.single.html).

26. Northeastern Baptist College, info at <http://nebcvt.org/>.

27. NETS Center for Church Planting and Revitalization, info at <http://www.thenetscenter.org/>.

property (127 acres), which will become a beautiful residential facility for training church planters. There are also already new church plants that are seeing significant conversion growth, such as Riverbank Church in White River Junction, VT and Next Level Church (started in New Hampshire with several campuses now), which is one of the fastest growing churches in the United States.

There is also evidence that God is specially preparing the hearts of people in the culture. One pastor described a sense of desperation for answers and spiritual openness he sees in his outreach endeavors.²⁸ A church planter who recently moved to New England recounted a conversation he had with a town official who was not a believer but felt a need to pursue spiritual things. He had no idea where to go, so he decided to start reading the Bible. He came to faith in Christ as he read the Scriptures and then found a church to attend. Though it is encouraging to see how God is working among the unchurched, it is a reminder that the church must continue to pray and be spiritually equipped to work in the fields. The church must continually seek spiritual renewal and power from on high.

Through Effective Communication of the Gospel

In his book *The Unbelievable Gospel*, pastor Jonathan Dodson aims to help believers to consider the way their witness for Christ comes across to the unchurched. The first part of the book examines evangelistic defeaters, such as an impersonal witness that treats people as projects or a preachy witness that comes across as self-righteous. Dodson's remedy for this is to help Christians gain a fresh, thorough understanding of the biblical gospel and then show them how to apply it to various people who have various perspectives and needs. So for example, after listening to someone and perceiving that they are seeking after acceptance, it may be wise to highlight the biblical

28. Timothy Frisch, "Church Leader Interview," conducted June–July 2016.

concept of justification—complete forgiveness and acceptance by God based solely upon the work of Christ.²⁹ Or for someone who feels trapped and hopeless, one might explain the concept of being a new creation in Christ.³⁰ His terminology for matching a gospel metaphor with a specific need is “speaking the gospel in cultural key.”³¹

This concept provides believers with much food for thought in terms of how they communicate the gospel. While it is true that the gospel has essential elements to it, it is also true that it incorporates a variety of themes and can be adapted to different situations. The Scripture shows a varied approach to explaining the gospel. For example, Paul engages a synagogue audience with the gospel by a direct appeal to the Scripture, whereas he engages the philosophically-minded Gentiles at Mars’ Hill by intersecting their own beliefs with a biblical worldview and providing an explanation of God’s call to repentance through Jesus (Cf. Acts 13:13–41; 17:22–31).

The church must communicate the gospel by adapting the message to the audience and context (as seen in the Bible). Also, for the gospel to be given in a biblical, culturally related manner, it must be displayed through the actions of believers. Pastor Timothy Keller has written extensively on the theological basis of Christians working for the good of the city. His ministry has developed efforts, such as the Center for Faith and Work,³² which seek to serve the city. Effective Christian ministries have a long history of testifying to the power of the gospel in communities by helping those addicted to alcohol or drugs, restoring broken marriages, and caring for those in

29. Cf. Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), Chapter 9.

30. Cf. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel*, Chapter 10.

31. Cf. Dodson, Chapter 8.

32. Information found at <http://faithandwork.com/>.

poverty. As Alvin Reid says to church planters, “If we cannot honestly say that the church will help individuals and families to build better relationships, will help make the community a better place to live, then we’re planting the wrong church.”³³

The church, then, effectively communicates the gospel through relevant communication rooted in sincere relationships with the lost and demonstrated by a testimony of God-glorifying work in the community. And the combination of effective gospel communication along with an emphasis on spiritual renewal are vital elements in helping the church reverse the trend toward secularism.

Response 2: Multiplying Discipleship

In response to the lack of gospel ministry, there must be an effort to increase disciple-making on an exponential level that will begin to have a tide-turning effect on the spiritual make-up of the culture. This can be accomplished through the local church being centered on a disciple-making process and utilizing replicative strategies in discipling individuals.

Through a Local Church Disciple-Making Process

It is the job of the local church to make disciples, and the only way for this to happen effectively is if local churches are designed around a disciple-making process and remain undistracted by an overload of programming. This is powerfully portrayed and systematically outlined in the book *Simple Church*, where Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger advocate church ministry

33. Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 187.

to be completely designed around and focused solely upon “a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.”³⁴

Many evangelical churches are good at teaching Scripture and communicating the way of salvation through Christ. However, there is often not a clear plan for helping individuals to grow in a holistic manner. Peter Scazzero, in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* gives a brutally honest account of how, even as a pastor, he had not matured in internally healthy ways in spite of years of involvement in the church. Even though he had learned a great deal of biblical knowledge, his soul was being drained because of the lack of internal focus and spiritual discipline of his ministry setting.³⁵

It is important for the church to do more than teach the mind, as if this will automatically filter down into attitudes and behavior. Methods and environments for inner cultivation are a vital part of the spiritual development process. John Wesley exemplified a masterful use of environments to cultivate inner soul care through his classes (which in some ways are akin to support and accountability groups).³⁶ Private practices for inner healing and growth must also be taught and cultivated among followers of Christ. This will help cultivate disciples who are truly mature and reflect the character of Christ because of the soul-restoring and changing work of the Spirit.

34. Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process of Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, Kindle Ed., 2011), 60.

35. Cf. Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

36. Cf. D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1997), chapter 3.

Through Replicative Strategies

The overwhelming lack of gospel ministry in New England means that this region should be approached as an unreached people group. Those engaged in reaching populations like this around the world have written about and worked in terms of church planting movements, not just church planting. The reason for this is that in order to transform culture on a large scale, there must be a rapid multiplication of gospel-planting ministry. Writers such as Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird in their book *Viral Churches* call on leaders to cultivate church planting multiplication movements, and more and more agencies are thinking of church planting in terms of multiplication rather than addition. Dave Ferguson's organization *Exponential* is even helping churches to evaluate their ability to grow through multiplication by using a 1 to 5 rating scale, in which a 1 is a church that is merely hanging on for survival, 3 is an adding church, and 5 is a church that multiplies through discipleship replication. Churches should evaluate where they are at along this continuum (using "Becoming a Level 5 Multiplier Assessment Tools")³⁷ and seek to make progress toward discipleship multiplication in their ministries. Furthermore, it is even more ideal for churches to consider planting churches that are embedded with Level 5 DNA at their core. This is exactly the concept behind the initiatives of Ralph Moore, Alan Hirsch, and Neil Cole, among others. Moore, for example has sparked a movement of over 2,000 churches, and his multiplication efforts are outlined in the book *How to Multiply Your Church*. There are many good resources, like those found at the Exponential website³⁸ (which offers a growing library of free books written by effective disciple-making leaders) and books like *Multiply* by Francis Chan, which can be easily utilized and distributed for helping disciples to make more disciples.

37. These assessments are available at <http://church-multiplication.com/>.

38. Located at <https://exponential.org/>.

Disciple-making multiplication will help the church get back to its primary call to make obedient followers of Jesus, and it is the key for making headway in a culture that lacks gospel ministry.

Response 3: Cooperating with Various Churches

In response to the lack of resources in relation to the needs of the region, it is vital for churches to begin to look beyond their own capacity and work with other like-minded churches for optimal impact. Cooperation for mission takes place by networking churches regionally and tapping into the collective and leveraged resources of those churches.

Through Networking Churches Regionally

The business world has seen a revolution in the last decade. This is due to new business concepts arising out of a world integrated like never before through internet technology. This has not only allowed for social-networking sites to arise and flourish but has also given way to new business models based on shared resources. Enterprises like AirBnB, which allows homeowners to rent rooms or houses to customers, and Uber, which provides a platform for people with vehicles to provide rides to others for profit, are both predicated on the concept of networking resources and making those resources easily accessible to people. They are also built on the concept of empowering the individual with the ability to provide business and make money by tapping into the larger business resources of the networking company.

This is not only a picture but a model of the biblical concept of unity and the power of networked resources. While many people think of unity in terms of relationship (which is the foundation of unity), unity is also related to mission (the purpose of unity). The greater the unity, the greater the missional impact. There are a couple of reasons that this is the case.

First, unity creates and cultivates movement. One powerful example of this is what is taking place in New York City. Mac Pier writes about the unifying of churches around the gospel and the impact this is having. New York City went from 1% to 3% evangelical from 1990 to 2010, and from 3% to 5% from 2010 to 2015, an increase of 2% of the population in just five years! Pier comments, “The question has to be raised: Why did it take twenty years to grow from 1 percent to 3 percent and only five years to grow from 3 percent to 5 percent? . . . I am convinced that one of the important factors is the increasingly prevalent expression of unity in the gathering of Christian leaders from across Manhattan and throughout the entire city.”³⁹ Movement Day was born out of this environment and has not only impacted the missional outreach in New York City but is being replicated in places around the United States and throughout the world. Movement fosters incredible missional impact, and movement is fundamentally created by unity around a shared ideal (e.g. ministering to and transforming a city through the power of the gospel).

Second, unity allows for greater missional impact because it provides the basis for sharing resources and tapping into new resources. Of course, this is already observed and practiced on a denominational level. However, denominational networks still have limited resources (particularly in places like New England), and the competition fostered by denominational loyalties can make it difficult for those resources to be used optimally in a given area. For example, a well-resourced church may have the ability to run a recovery program and meet a certain amount of need, but if this church and other churches are unwilling to work together in a particular area, they will miss out on the opportunity to have a greater impact by getting more people from various churches involved in the initiative to provide recovery assistance. This is just one of many examples that could be given,

39. Mac Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel: Stories and Strategies for Transforming Your City* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 47.

but the upshot is that denominational networking in areas like upper New England has limited impact, and regional networking provides a much more powerful impetus for missional movement and effectiveness through the sharing of resources and cooperation of individuals on a much larger scale than any one church could possibly supply.

Third, unity promotes a wider expression of the gospel to a culture with a very diverse population. The gospel itself is unchanging in its content, but the way in which it engages and changes various groups of people can look different depending on the characteristics of the people group being impacted. Unity encourages churches to plant even more churches that will reach different kinds of people rather than competing for the existing churchgoers. Competition leads to “stealing sheep” from other churches; cooperation leads to giving sheep to the formation of new churches. Competition leads to church decline; cooperation leads to church multiplication.

Through Tapping into Collective Resources

It may seem from what has been presented about New England’s cultural realities that there is little the church can do in light of the vast physical, emotional, and ultimately spiritual needs of upper New England. However, the problem lies not so much in the size of the problem but in the church’s approach to the problem, which has largely been a fragmented approach to mission where church cooperation is minimal in a given area. The truth is, the church is a vast store of resources (the infinite resources of God and the spiritual gifting of His people). There are both present resources readily available to impact communities as well as potential resources that have yet to be unearthed.

The situation can be likened to the natural resource for which upper New England is highly well-known: maple syrup. This delicious culinary resource is in high reserve, latent within all of the

countless maple trees of the region. If one were to try to feed an extremely large group of people (a few million) with this substance, it would seem impossible if one were thinking of trees having to produce the resource individually. One tree can produce about a quart to a half gallon of syrup, which is a good amount but not nearly enough to feed a large population. However, if the trees were to be tapped in a collective manner (by drilling holes in each tree and then running tubes from tree to tree), then they would be able to feed much larger populations. The same is true of the church. Each church may have a decent amount of productivity, but on its own, the resources it can provide are limited. However, if the resources of churches begin to be combined and leveraged, the ability to meet what once seemed an impossibly high demand becomes doable.

Resources like maple syrup, however, must not only be tapped into and collectively harnessed, but there must be a means of distributing that resource in an accessible way to the population. Hence, the syrup is placed in various size bottles and distributed to stores and locations where many people are likely to go to acquire the resource. In the same way, the church must harness its vast resources and find ways to make these resources fully accessible to the population at large and in a manner the population will actually utilize.

Regional cooperation and tapping into collective resources will facilitate optimal engagement of the body of Christ into the culture, and this is sorely needed in light of the vast physical and spiritual needs of upper New England.

Response 4: Being Visible and Accessible in the Community

In response to the disconnect between church and culture, churches must seek to be more visible and accessible within the communities in which they reside. Jesus told His followers to let their light shine before people, not to hide it, so that others would see their good works and come to

glorify God (Matthew 5:16). The separation between church and culture that has emerged, whether intentionally or inadvertently, makes it easy for followers of Jesus to be disregarded for who they truly are by the world around. This should be unacceptable to believers in light of their mission and what Jesus says about letting their light shine. The church can address this issue by becoming more visible and accessible through presence in the community and through innovation.

Through Community Presence

Many churches are gospel-preaching, scripturally faithful ministries, but they have minimal gospel impact because their members do not interact deeply with those outside of church. The church must cultivate a culture where believers are able to truly get to know the lost. As Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger write,

We continually have listened to the moans of church leaders. We have heard the cries from pastors for years, "our people just do not seem to know lost people."

Hmmmm. Perhaps our church people do not know lost people because our churches have kept people at the church building, thereby nullifying their opportunities to deeply engage in relationships with lost people. Leaders often guilt people into coming to the church, removing them from the world. Churches with minimal programming help their people live among the world as missionaries by not asking them to live at the church, but to live as the church.⁴⁰

As this quote points out, the only way for church members to get to know lost people is to get out of the church building and interact more with people in their natural settings. Gospel ministry must be thought about and carried out in terms of incarnation (going to people with the presence and power of Christ) rather than extraction (bringing people out of their ordinary context to be with Christians). By taking the time to get to know non-believing individuals and investing in their lives, this will have a powerful effect in breaking down the walls between committed followers

40. Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, The Postscript.

of Christ and those outside of the church community. But it will only be spiritually effective and fruitful if initiating relationships is done so with a gospel-saturated mindset that seeks to display the love of Jesus and share the reality of who He is.

Through Innovation

“Tradition is the living faith of those now dead, but traditionalism is the dead faith of those now living.”⁴¹ This axiom presents a balanced view of the church in relation to tradition. On one hand, tradition is not inherently bad and is actually important to the spiritual continuity of the community of faith. Paul speaks positively and even forcefully about following tradition (I Cor. 11:2; II Thess. 2:15; 3:6), and Jude speaks of the faith in terms of something delivered and in need of defense (Jude 1:3). On the other hand, tradition can be a man-made form of religion that is bereft of true spiritual power and divine approval (Mark 7:8, 13; Col. 2:8; I Pet. 1:18).

Traditionalism (as Reid puts it) can unnecessarily hamper the church’s ability to relate to the culture. It is wise for the church to consider whether things that are normal and comfortable for those who have attended church all of their lives would be accessible or make sense to those who are unfamiliar with church life. This is where a church can consider items such as church attire, the environment within the church building, style of music, or even primary Bible translation usage. As one pastor pointed out, malls in some places are becoming obsolete, whereas shopping itself is never obsolete. Similarly, certain aspects of how church is conducted may become less effective, but church itself is never obsolete. There are always new ways to relate to and incorporate people into church communities because the core needs do not change.

41. Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 86.

One key area for the church to consider is preaching and how it relates to the current cultural context. Preaching and teaching should rest in the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word as Christ is preached (I Cor. 2:1–4). But it must also, as Timothy Keller highlights and exemplifies, aim for the heart, which among other things, “is connecting to people in their actual cultural setting.”⁴² Keller also highlights the importance of using accessible or well-explained vocabulary, noting that one “should not use unexplained theological terms like ‘hermeneutics,’ ‘eschatological,’ ‘covenant,’ ‘kingdom,’ or even ‘theological’ repeatedly. If you do, not only will outsiders to the faith be confused, but Christians will intuitively know not to bring their less initiated friends to hear you. If the term is important enough, you should regularly explain it and come up with an accessible definition that you cite often.”⁴³

The issue is not about changing the fundamental nature of preaching (which must never change) but making sure the preaching communicatively connects with unchurched people who are listening—preaching Christ and preaching to the hearts of the hearers.

There are many other ways in which to engage the culture in contextually informed ways, especially if churches are willing to be innovative. One church in Tampa Florida has seen rapid growth and impact in its city through its proliferation of “Micro-Churches,” an innovative approach to missional community replication.⁴⁴ In Claremont, NH, one church member has opened a coffee bar, social club environment for the purpose of missional outreach and relevant engagement of the

42. Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York City, NY: Viking, 2015), 165.

43. Keller, *Preaching*, 103.

44. Ministry website is at <http://tampaunderground.com>.

culture with the gospel.⁴⁵ Recently, a person wrote on the graffiti wall at this establishment that they “got saved at REMIX.” This was due in part to this ministry’s innovative way of taking the unchanging gospel into a changing culture through a creative means of outreach.

Accessibility and innovation in gospel ministry are a matter of being good missionaries in the place God has placed His people, and they are important principles for reaching a culture that has become so disconnected from the worldview and life of the church.

Hypothesis of This Project

The hypothesis of this thesis-project is that networking churches through the Connect Center initiative (described below) will have a measurable impact in relation to the present cultural realities of upper New England. Specifically, it is surmised that the church in the Claremont region will have better missional impact by cultivating resources that are specifically targeted to meet the needs of the population (helping the church to be missionally focused on the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the population), by leveraging those resources through networking and cooperative efforts (helping the church to work together on mission), and by making these resources highly visible and accessible to the community (helping the church to have a better rapport and impact in the community). The missional impact will be measured qualitatively and quantitatively by analyzing feedback from leaders who are part of the networking activity of this project and documenting the overall number of gospel-sharing ministries and the attendance trend of evangelical ministry in Claremont, NH.⁴⁶

45. Ministry website is at <http://tampaunderground.com>.

46. See Appendix E for discussion questions used in post-project feedback with individuals representing the Claremont City Planning office, Tender Loving Connections organization in Claremont, and the ministries of Shining Success and REMIX (both highlighted in this project as creative missional ministries).

This project is being conducted in Claremont, NH, but the principles gleaned from these efforts can be adapted to other similar settings in rural, upper New England as well as other rural, post-Christian contexts.

The Connect Center: A Strategic Approach to Networking for Mission

With the concepts outlined in this chapter in mind., it is ideal to implement a missional approach that aids the church in its God-given mission, helps to multiply disciple-making efforts, incorporates the networking and cooperation of churches regionally in order to tap into the present and potential resources of the church at large, and makes these resources optimally accessible to a portion of the population that is generally disconnected from church. This section will outline a strategic ministry concept for carrying out these ideals.

Description of the Connect Center

The Connect Center is designed to be a visible representation of church unity and tangible space for cooperative missional effort. The stated purpose is “to provide space for network churches to work together, offer events and classes, and connect area residents with the various resources and programs our churches offer.” It is, therefore, a means for connecting churches to one another and connecting people in the community to churches.

The Connect Center ministry concept was first implemented in Claremont, NH in 2015. It presently operates out of business space in the downtown of this city. The following is a description of its operation and service to the church and community.

1. A Missional Incubator

First of all, the Connect Center serves as a missional incubator for the church. It accomplishes this in two ways. The first is by being ears in the community to hear from individuals and community organizations and studying statistics to assess what are some of the greatest areas of need in the community. The Connect Center is then able to raise awareness among the church at large about these needs through online presence (website, e-mail, Facebook) and through interaction with church leaders and presentations at churches.

After assessing and communicating about the needs of the area, the Connect Center seeks to cultivate initiative for missional action. The idea is that by being more aware of what people in the community are like and are dealing with, Christians will be better prepared to be missionaries in this environment. Then, the task is to come up with ideas for bringing the gospel to bear in this context. The Connect Center helps foster missional action by providing space for people from various churches to meet for prayer and edification, by promoting church resources both at the Connect Center location and online, and by giving presentations at churches and events to cast vision for mission and to find potential leaders and helpers to implement missional ministry efforts.

The missional incubation activity described here serves the purpose of bolstering the present missional activities of churches and also generating new or modified efforts to bring the gospel-work of the church into the lives of people in the community.

2. A Training Center

The Connect Center provides space for churches to have classes, support groups, and training events for the purpose of developing disciples and training individuals and teams for missional

endeavors. This could include, but is not limited to, training teams in starting disciple-making groups, missional communities, and church-planting initiatives. The training activity is a means of aiding the church in its disciple-making and multiplying efforts.

3. A Networking Organization

The Connect Center is a networking hub, and it provides networking by keeping in touch with church leaders, by providing space for pastors' meetings and other inter-church meetings, and by organizing and/or supporting inter-church events. Fostering relationships among the churches allows churches to find people from other churches to help with particular ministries and ministry events, thus capitalizing on the sharing of various resources. The networking activity is a means of integrating and harnessing the resources of the church for optimal impact.

4. An Accessible Business Location

Finally, being located downtown in the heart of the city, the Connect Center keeps a hand on the pulse of the city through interaction with city leaders and community organization leaders as well as individual residents of the community. This takes place through Connect Center staff and/or volunteers attending meetings with other community leaders and having discussion with them about the needs of the community in relation to the resources that are available. Getting to know key leaders provides the church with greater presence and influence for good in the community and builds a stronger rapport with people in various social spheres for greater trust and cooperation in tackling various challenges.

Furthermore, being in a business location downtown, community residents are easily able to call, e-mail, or walk in for communication with personnel at the Connect Center, which in turn enables contact with any of the churches or other community organizations in a direct manner. For

example, if someone needs food and does not know where to go, the Connect Center makes it easy for an individual to walk in and inquire for direction as to any church or organization that may be able to help. Or if someone has a physical need, the Connect Center is able to contact several church offices through e-mail and more efficiently discover any resources that may be of service. A walk-in client is also able to benefit from looking at a bulletin board and display area where various church and community organization informational material is available. This is a quick and easy way for community members to be informed about resources from a wide variety of places, including various churches.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR NETWORKING CREATIVE MISSIONAL MINISTRIES

Introduction

This project has identified four missional challenges in an upper New England context and four missional responses to these challenges. The missional responses include incubating missional activity, networking church resources, cultivating discipleship practices, providing optimal accessibility to members of the community. These strategies can be classified under four themes headings, which include mission, cooperation, contextualization, and discipleship multiplication. This chapter will outline the theological foundation that supports all of these themes as a biblical, well-rounded, and necessary approach to mission.

In order to demonstrate the principles undergirding the missional strategy, this chapter will show how the Bible defines the church in terms of its mission, cooperative relationships, contextualization of message and witness, and multiplicative discipleship. It will also provide an emphasis and theological guide to what might be the greatest challenge missionally in an American context: cooperative relationships among ministries and people of different denominational ties. It will conclude with a summary of the material presented.

The Church's Mission

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20; ESV).

It is clear that the church was given a mandate from Christ. This is often referred to as “The Great Commission.” If the church is not carrying out this mission, then it is failing to fundamentally be what God has called it to be. And just as the first disciples were in an environment where multitudes had yet to hear and be impacted by the message of the gospel, many people in this generation have not experienced a vibrant and clear witness of the gospel from the church. There are four elements seen in Scripture that are integral to the carrying out of this mission.

1. The Message of the Mission

First of all, the mission of the church centers on a message, the *evangel* (the good news, or the gospel). This is the message that is highlighted in the first four books of the New Testament (hence the title “Gospels”), and it is the message proclaimed by the apostles (sent ones) of Jesus Christ. It was so vital to the first preachers, that they guarded their time to be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1–4; ESV).

The apostle Paul, who sacrificed his life for the sake of the gospel, said that the gospel is of first importance: “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins. . . (1 Cor. 15:1). It is fundamentally important to the mission of the church because it is the “power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:18). It is the message about the cross, which is “foolish” to those who do not believe but a powerful, saving message to those who do believe 1 Cor. 1:18). Paul

says faith comes from hearing the word (Rom. 10:17), and thus it is the very life-source by which Christians are born spiritually. As the apostle Peter states, “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (I Peter 2:23).

Without the message of Christ, the gospel, there can be no faithful mission for Christ. This is true, first, because Christ commanded His people to be witnesses of the gospel (cf. Acts 1:8). Second, true transformation comes by saving grace, which comes by hearing the message of Christ (Eph. 2:8–10; II Cor. 5:17; Rom. 10:17). The mission must be accomplished through the powerful, life-altering and culture-transforming message of the gospel.

2. The Movement of the Mission

The next element of mission is that of movement. Not only was the word (message) of Christ being preached by Jesus’ followers, it was being spread. The Great Commission itself says that Christians are to make disciples “as they are going” (cf. Matthew 28:19). In Acts, Jesus explicitly says that His witnesses are to take the gospel from their local place of Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). And this is exactly what the disciples sought to do, spreading the word of Christ wherever they went, though sometimes being brought to new places because of persecution (e.g. Acts 8:1, 4). The book of Acts, of course, highlights the missionary activity of Paul, who was an early church planter and demonstrates the mission carried out through movement. An example of his activity is seen in Acts 14, which says,

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21–24; ESV)

3. *The Multiplication of the Mission*

In the book of Acts, Luke shows that it was not just a mission involving movement, but one involving the multiplication of disciples. While it is true that missionaries like Paul, Barnabas, and Silas were key to the spreading of the gospel, the amount of rapid growth, spread, and influence of Christianity was due to people bringing people who were bringing people to Christ, and so on. In the book *Concentric Circles of Concern*, author W. Arthur Thompson relates his epiphany in regard to how the gospel was actually spread:

I went back to my own class at the seminary the next day. My dear students never know what is going to happen next. I said, “Scratch everything; we are starting over.” Well, we were halfway through the semester. They looked at me like a calf looks at a new gate.

I continued by saying, “Class, I have a new assignment. It is an assignment that you cannot finish this semester. You will not finish it until God takes you home.”

I drew those concentric circles and said, “The gospel did not go from house to house to house down the street like a nice, neat census.

“It went from house to house to house” [in non-linear fashion, through relationships].¹

As the gospel spread rapidly in the first century by one person telling another who told another, the missionaries were seen by outsiders as those who were turning the world upside down (cf. Acts 17:6). In other words, they were disrupting and impacting society because so many people were coming to Christ and experiencing a radical change.

4. *The Mindset of the Mission*

Finally, in regard to mission it is important to note that the first disciples were not those who were characterized as having mere head-knowledge. They understood that the message of the gospel and the movement of which they were a part was one of obedience to Jesus—hence, the term

1. W. Oscar Thompson, Jr., *Concentric Circles of Concern: Seven Stages for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 21–22.

“disciples” and, as Jesus said, they were taught to observe all that He commanded (Matt. 28:19).

Jesus said that to follow Him would be a sacrifice, and there is a cost that must be counted (cf. Luke 14:25–33). The disciples, then, were characterized by radically devoted lives in which they cared for one another, worshipped together, and gave powerful witness to the world (cf. Acts 2, 5).

Ultimately, they were givers who were willing to run contrary to the larger culture and suffer persecution if need be. (More blessed to give; suffer persecution) This selfless, God-centered, obedient-to-Christ lifestyle is the only one that can be truly said to reflect the mission of Christ as He envisioned it carried out in His people.

The Church’s Multiplication

The church in Scripture is seen to be on mission, which led to the multiplication of disciples who then became part of local churches (groups, congregations). Today, the concept of a local church is commonplace. However, there is a strong tendency, particularly in America, to see local churches as separate from one another, operating completely independently (except perhaps with a level of cooperation within a denomination or fellowship). This is actually by design, but it does not square with the biblical vision of church.

The Reality of Unity

How did the early church function? On one hand it can be described as local, meaning it consisted of groups of people who personally knew and cared for one another. In Acts for example, Luke writes that believers went to houses and shared life together (Acts 2:44–46; 5:42; 20:20). Another way in which the local expression of the church is seen is in how Paul writes to specific churches, where the members are specifically identified and known by the people of that group (e.g. Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1). Finally, there is the manner in which Jesus addresses

the church by speaking to seven groups in seven cities in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 2–3).

These scriptural depictions form the basis of describing churches as congregations, assemblies, and so on.

However, the Scriptures also depict the church on a large scale as a network of these churches that ultimately compose one body. This is observed in how the church groups cared about one another and even cared *for* one another, even across large geographical regions. Paul encourages and facilitates the giving of an offering from churches in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1–7) to the church in Jerusalem. When dealing with doctrinal difficulties and seeking to bring clarity to the gospel message, churches came together and worked together to establish consensus and maintain unity (Acts 15:1–33). Also, churches shared apostolic writings, which became the source of the New Testament canon. This is seen, for example, in what Paul says to the Colossian church: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16; ESV).

These Scriptural depictions reveal the reality of a unified church, a large network composed of many smaller groups (congregations or assemblies) scattered over a very broad area.

The Witness of Unity

The unity of the churches in Scripture relates to mission. Jesus’ prayer in John 17 reveals this: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20–21; ESV) Unity is actually a sign to the world that Jesus truly is from God because He is able to bring people together in a manner beyond human capability. In His own ministry, Jesus was able to bring people of various backgrounds

together, including a tax collector and a zealot, who would have been polar opposites politically and likely enemies.

Paul, a zealous Jew by background, shows how Jesus is able to bring Jews and Gentiles together as part of one body (Eph. 2:14–16), as well as many other types of people who can be easily at odds because of outward traits: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27–28).

It is not a sign to the world for churches to try to get people who look and act like them and have many of the same cultural traits to be part of their organization. What shows the world that Jesus is mighty and true is that His people rise above human distinction and the tendency toward prejudice (cf. James 2:1–13). People in American culture hunger for solidarity and acceptance among different kinds of individuals, and the church should stand out as a sign of true hope in a world plagued by hatred and division. Sadly, it is easy to believe that we can do mission well without working toward greater unity, but as Mac Pier points out, “Division in the church breeds atheism in the world.”² This is especially true among rising generations who cannot understand how people who claim to follow a loving Savior can be so divided and critical. Unity among God’s people not only enhances mission, it is vital to it.

Below we will revisit the theme of unity to see practical ways in which to overcome present day obstacles to cooperation in the church. Suffice it to say for now, unity is key to fulfillment of mission.

2. Mac Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel: Stories and Strategies for Transforming Your Cities*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 20.

The Church's Contextualization

The church is not on cooperative mission in a vacuum but is a witness to a particular time and place. Out of its collective witness, the church on mission will be both a blessing and challenge to the surrounding culture in which it resides.

Timothy Keller shows how Israel, in exile, was commissioned by God to inhabit an unbelieving (pagan) culture. The Babylonians sought to assimilate people groups into their own culture and belief system. Meanwhile, a certain false prophet declared that Israel would be brought back to their land quickly, therefore there would be no need to engage with Babylonian culture.

Keller points out,

Instead God, through the prophet Jeremiah, contradicts both the Babylonians' strategy and the false prophet's counsel. On the one hand, God tells his people to "increase in number there; do not decrease" (Jer 29:6) to retain their distinct community identity and to grow, but he also tells them to settle down and engage in the life of the great city" . . .

This is quite a balance! From Genesis 11 all the way through Revelation, Babylon is represented as the epitome of a civilization built on selfishness, pride, and violence — the ultimate city of man. The values of this city contrast absolutely with those of the city of God; yet here the citizens of the city of God are called to be the very best residents of this particular city of man. God commands the Jewish exiles not to attack, despise, or flee the city — but to seek its peace, to love the city as they grow in numbers.³

He then ties this in with how it relates to the church's witness today. "Loving and serving the city not only shows love and compassion; doing so also strengthens the hands of the people of God, who bear the message of the gospel."⁴

Pastor J. D. Greear did not always think of the church in terms of being a blessing to the city. But his view adjusted as he considered the portrayal of the church in the book of Acts. He says,

The truth was that I had a limited vision for my city. If anything, I saw the city like a virus sees a host. Our goal was to draw enough people out of it to make our church great. I

3. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 142–143.

4. Keller, *Center Church*, 143.

thought more about what the city could do for our church than what our church could do for the city.

The apostles viewed ministry much differently. A few weeks after my trip to Southeast Asia, I was reading the book of Acts and was struck by the story of Philip in Samaria. The writer of Acts records that as a result of Philip's ministry, there was "much joy" in the city (Acts 8:8, ESV). In a sermon, I asked our church if there was "much joy" in our city as a result of our ministry. The answer was "no."

That realization set us on a path to not just grow our church, but to reach and bless our city. It significantly broadened the scope of our ministry. Twelve years later, in many ways we feel like we're still just getting started. We could double our efforts tomorrow to bless our city and still only impact a fraction of the 1.5 million in Raleigh-Durham who don't know Christ.⁵

It is true that the case can be made that the church should bring a measure of joy as a result of its witness and good works (Matt. 5:16). But this witness also brings a challenge to the culture. Luke says of the outsiders who observed what was happening in and through God's people, "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5:13–14; ESV).

So, there is both a sense of favor drawing people towards this movement but also a sense of apprehension and sometimes outright persecution (e.g. Matt. 5:10–12; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). This is part and parcel of bringing the gospel into whatever culture the church resides. Keller aptly states, "A contextualized gospel is marked by clarity and attractiveness, and yet it still challenges sinners' self-sufficiency and calls them to repentance. It adapts and connects to the culture, yet at the same time challenges and confronts it."⁶ So the church simultaneously blesses and challenges the culture through its witness of Christ.

5. J. D. Greear, *Sending Capacity, Not Seating Capacity: Why a Church Gains the Most When It Sends It's Best* (U.S.: J.D. Greear and Mike McDaniel, 2015), 18.

6. Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

The Church's Multiplication

The concept of discipleship multiplication has already been addressed above. But here it is important to see that multiplication in the early church was the result of various key factors at play. Missional movement, cooperation, and contextualization provide the environment in which discipleship can take place and thrive. Mac Pier has amply shown the power of cooperation in relation to witness, as he has conducted various city-wide church gatherings throughout the United States,⁷ which has brought a vibrant witness to large, urban areas and has created a climate of spiritual change. Sadly, perhaps the greatest challenge to provide an optimal environment for missional movement in the American context is the fragmentation of the church and the resulting fractured and dimmed witness. Since this is an area of particular challenge in the American missional context, the following sections are offered with an eye toward solidifying the biblical foundation of unity and offering a practical theological grid for pursuing unity.

The Basis of Unity

In order to be faithful to the vision of unity articulated by Christ and the apostles, there are three bases of unity listed below that will be presented as the most Scripturally faithful and as the most practically workable in endeavoring to keep (or work toward) the unity provided through the Holy Spirit.

1. Scripture

The first basis of unity is the Scripture; that is, the canon of the Old and New Testament books of the Bible. Right here, it must be acknowledged that there is a symbiotic relationship

7. Mac Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel: Stories and Strategies for Transforming Your Cities*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

between the recognition of what is Scripture and the body of Christ. In other words, it was the church which collectively made a decision on what is to be considered authoritative Scripture. This, historically, was based on various criteria. For example, the New Testament books had to have been written by an apostle or endorsed by an apostle, had to be widely read and accepted in the churches, and had to doctrinally coincide with other Scripture. Ultimately, then, the Scripture was recognized by the church to be canonical because it was acknowledged as spiritually authoritative, reflecting the teaching of Christ and the apostles (the Old Testament canon being accepted by the Jews and utilized as Scripture by Jesus and the apostles). The Scriptures may have been officially designated as inspired writings by the church, but the implication and practice was to use these writings as the foundation for Christian doctrine.

A good example of this principle is observed in how the church fathers used Scripture.

Gregory of Nyssa, in the Arian debate, writes,

“What then is our reply? We do not think that it is right to make their prevailing custom the law and rule of sound doctrine. For if custom is to avail for proof of soundness, we too, surely, may advance our prevailing custom; and if they reject this, we are surely not bound to follow theirs. Let the inspired Scripture, then, be our umpire, and the vote of truth will surely be given to those whose dogmas are found to agree with the Divine words. (Dogmatic Treatises, Book 12. On the Trinity, To Eustathius.)”⁸

Or note Augustine, who writes,

“For the reasonings of any men whatsoever, even though they be [true Christians], and of high reputation, are not to be treated by us in the same way as the canonical Scriptures are treated. We are at liberty, without doing any violence to the respect which these men deserve, to condemn and reject anything in their writings, if perchance we shall find that they have entertained opinions differing from that which others or we ourselves have, by the divine help, discovered to be the truth. I deal thus with the writings of others, and I wish my intelligent readers to deal thus with mine. (Augustine, Letters, 148.15)⁹

8. Nathan Busenitz, “Sola Scriptura and the Church Fathers” (Accessed July 2015; available at <http://www.tms.edu/preachersandpreaching/sola-scriptura-and-the-church-fathers/>).

9. Busenitz, “Sola Scriptura and the Church Fathers.”

These excerpts reveal the theological weight given to Scripture by the ancient church in determining doctrine and practice in the Christian life.

A complicating factor in relation to the discussion of Scriptural authority is the consideration of church tradition. Much debate has ensued on this topic, but a fundamental point is that the apostle Paul describes Scripture as thus: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” This statement follows on the heels of Paul saying that “the Holy Scriptures. . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:15b, NIV). These descriptions not only reveal the divine authority the apostle attributes to Scripture but also its doctrinal thoroughness for one’s salvation. In other words, while tradition may have a place in the Christian life, the Scripture is sufficient in providing the information necessary for salvation.

Some may take issue with the previous statement, but even Jesus showed that tradition (even in the context of a spiritual community) can be misguided, particularly if it supplants or contradicts God’s Word. Answering Pharisees and scribes who criticized Him for not following the elders’ tradition, Jesus said, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God” (Matthew 15:3b–6; ESV). Jesus, here, shows that tradition does not carry the same weight as God’s Word; it is even to be disregarded if it violates the Scripture. And the apostles and church fathers echo the same great regard for Scripture exemplified by the Lord Jesus.

In light of the apostolic and historical significance of Scripture in the life of the church, it is most assuredly a primary basis for the pursuit of unity. This, of course, leaves many questions still open for debate and discussion, such as who has the authority to interpret Scripture and how may it be rightly interpreted. But the scope of this paper is merely to point out that Scripture itself has an inherent authority and looking to it for guidance will help promote a spirit of unity (especially considering it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is the true source of unity among God's people). This was the practice of the early church and it ought to be the practice of the church today.

2. *Gospel*

If the Scripture has always had authority in the life of the church, so has the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul was transformed by an encounter with Christ and eventually went on to spread the gospel all over the Roman world. Here is the significance and priority he assigns the gospel:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6–9; NKJV).

It is clear that Paul believes the gospel is of such importance that those who deny or pervert it are pronounced accursed. This applies to anyone, even if it is an angel or one of the apostles themselves (“even if we” Paul says). The gospel is given greater authority than any angel or human because the gospel is divine. This is the same logic that applies to the Scripture.

The importance and authority of the gospel is so immense, that later in this letter, Paul is seen confronting Peter:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed. . . I said to Peter before *them* all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:11, 14b–16a; NKJV).

The gospel is of such spiritual magnitude that Paul places it above Peter’s authority and reputation. Those who attest to apostolic authority should note that the apostles themselves bowed to the authority of the gospel of Christ.

The gospel, therefore, represents another valid basis for spiritual unity among God’s people, as it was seen to be in the beginning stages of the church. This still leaves some openness on the question of the gospel’s content and how one exactly defines the gospel. But even in the short account alluded to, it is clear that Paul wants to put no stumbling block in the way of people’s understanding of justification through faith in Christ. But another passage, which outlines the apostolic definition of the gospel perhaps even more directly is in I Corinthians 15, where Paul says,

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15:1–4; NKJV).

The gospel centers on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, one must believe that this historically took place. But a key point is the reason given for Christ’s death: for our sins. This becomes pivotal to understanding and embracing the apostolic witness to the gospel. The gospel is the declaration of what God has done in Jesus Christ, and what He has done relates very much to humanity’s sin condition. Even the name of Jesus was assigned for Him to Mary because it denotes that He would be the Savior from sin.

It is a gospel of salvation from sin; this is why Christ died (I Cor, 15:2–3). And it is a gospel calling individuals to faith in Christ. This was a point of contention in Paul’s day, and it is still a point of contention in the religious community today. The apostolic gospel was saying something divisive and profound on this point, as observed in Paul’s words to the Romans: “A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God” (Romans 2:28–29: NIV).

These were fighting words to some, but the point is that circumcision was an outward act and is not the same as a true work of God’s Spirit. Paul says explicitly elsewhere that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15; NKJV). If circumcision does not avail, why should anyone look to some other physical rite as inherently necessary for salvation? This is not to say that rites such as baptism are unimportant, but it is to say that the gospel call to faith can still be obscured and obstructed by human requirements. This is exactly what Paul says the gospel contrasts. It is not about humans meeting requirements to be accepted by God but rather God meeting the requirements for salvation in Christ and humans living by faith in Him.

This exposition is not meant to attack or bring unnecessary division but is meant to clarify that the gospel given by the apostles is one focusing on salvation (through the historic life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and precluding human performance of religious ritual or regulation as a means to salvation. Of course, there are still many gospel themes that others would wish to bring out, and in no way is this presentation intending to exclude other important theological realities. However, these are foundational points that are presented and

defended in Scripture and must be worked through if the church is to experience greater unity.

The words of one Roman Catholic highlight this reality,

For Catholics, the gospel includes the visible Church Christ founded and submission to her teaching authority, along with the seven sacraments and the belief in sacred Tradition. For Catholics, the content of the gospel includes the content of the Creed, which requires believing in the Catholic Church. Hence, reducing the gospel to the bare bones of what we have in common with our Protestant brothers is simply not an option for Catholics. We cannot sell someone short of the full truth found in the Catholic Church. At the same time, Protestant evangelists would no doubt object to a Catholic they were with sharing the full Catholic gospel, since Protestants think much of it to be wrong, and vice versa.¹⁰

Perhaps this individual's view does not represent a universal perspective, but it undeniably reveals the tension experienced today over the church's understanding of the gospel. And while some would wish to downplay the differences among Christian groups, anyone who takes the words of Scripture seriously should take the issue of one's understanding of the gospel seriously. Therefore, this is a foundation point that must continue to be an important marker on what Christians can unite upon and must continue to be discussed and even debated in order to promote true spiritual health and unity in the long run.

To illustrate how this plays out practically, one might consider the conversion of J. I. Packer, who grew up in the Church of England and considered himself a Christian. He states, "I thought of Christianity as on a par with cleaning my teeth, mainly something that you regularly did, but you didn't think about it, not even when you were doing it." While attending Oxford University, he was invited to an evangelistic meeting. Here is how he describes his awakening to the reality of the gospel:

The first such preaching service that I attended the sermon lasted three-quarters of an hour and was preached by an elderly gentleman who within the first 20 minutes bored

10. Devin Rose, "A Catholic Reflection on John Armstrong's *Your Church is Too Small*" (Accessed July 2015; available at <http://www.calledto communion.com/2012/03/a-catholic-reflection-on-john-armstrong%E2%80%99s-your-church-is-too-small/>).

me. Then he started telling at length the story of his own conversion and suddenly everything became clear. I am not a person who gets much in the way of visions or visuals, but the concept called up a picture which was there in my mind was that here I am outside of the house and looking through the window and I understand what they are doing. I recognize the games they are playing. Clearly they are enjoying themselves, but I am outside. Why am I outside? Because I have been evading the Lord Jesus and His call. Once that had become clear my defenses fell quite rapidly, and at the end of the service we sang “Just As I Am” and by the end of the hymn I was a believer.¹¹

This testimony is not intended to set a universal pattern for how all should experience conversion. But the point is that the gospel does bring conversion. Church attendance and involvement in religious practices does not equate to faith in Christ, and the church must unify around and preach a gospel that calls people to a personal response of genuine repentance and faith in Christ alone.

3. *Orthodoxy*

The final basis of unity flows from the first two, although this subject must be approached more cautiously because it is built on the foundation of divine Scripture and the divine gospel but itself is not directly the words of Christ or the apostles. That being said, it is still wise to look to the historic witness of the church and understand the tenets of what was considered to be universally acknowledged as sound teaching. So, the third basis for unity is encapsulated in the term *orthodoxy* and can be best observed in the early creeds and decisions of the church.

Professor Justin Holcomb provides a definition of a “creed” as follows, “Creeds aren’t dogmas that are imposed on Scripture but are themselves drawn from the Bible and provide a touchstone to the faith for Christians of all times and places.”¹² Examples of early creeds and

11. Joel Belz, “J.I. Packer: The Lost Interview (Accessed July 2015; available at http://www.worldmag.com/2013/12/j_i_packer_the_lost_interview/page1).

12. Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Kindle Ed., 2014), 13.

universal church decisions are found in the “Apostles Creed” (ca. 140), the “Nicene Creed” (325), and the “Athanasian Creed” (late 400s to early 500s).¹³

An entire volume or volumes could be written on these texts and the historical circumstances surrounding them, but what is crucial to this discussion is that the church gave clear witness to its understanding of important Christian doctrine. This is how Christians today possess widespread cohesion on doctrines such as the Trinity and the divinity and humanity of Christ. It is sadly true that there have been endless divisions among professing Christian groups, but the most tragic outcome of recent church history is the spawning and spread of doctrines that long ago were regarded as heresy and formation of many cults that utilize the title “Christian.” Of course, it is easy to go the opposite extreme and seek agreement on every minute point of doctrine before accepting others as true Christians, but the reality of the rampant dispersion of unorthodox doctrines is a valid concern and in no way facilitates unity among God’s people.

Therefore, orthodoxy concerning the historic tenets of the Christian faith articulated in the early creeds and decisions of the church is a third basis for carrying out the apostolic vision of the church and another valid means of working toward unity today.

Tiers of Doctrines

How it is possible to partner with Christians who hold to different viewpoints? Already, the theological groundwork for how to come together has been laid in outlining the three bases of unity: Scripture, Gospel, and Orthodoxy. But working this out in practical terms entails taking these three bases and integrating them with a system of theological prioritization.

13. Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils*, 5.

When it comes to how one engages and potentially partners with other Christians who hold to different viewpoints, it is important to recognize that there are different levels of weight that can (and should) be assigned to various doctrines. There are, first and foremost, essential doctrines. These are doctrines that would be considered necessary in identifying someone as a Christian. This is not to say that someone who is different in these areas cannot possibly be a true believer, but it does mean that someone who does not hold to these doctrines is at least bringing biblical-historical doctrines of the Christian faith into question, which is severely problematic. The three bases of unity outlined above would, for our purposes, fit into this category or tier of essential doctrines.

The second category or tier of doctrines are matters of theological importance, perhaps enough to merit different denominational tables and ties, but not to the extent that they preclude churches and ministries working together for the sake of mission. These doctrinal positions may make it hard for individuals to “do church” together (e.g. infant vs. believer’s baptism), but they are not necessarily so vital to the Christian faith to stand in the way of missional partnerships. Billy Graham is an example of someone who brought many people together who were agreed on first tier (essential) doctrines but were varied on second tier (secondary) doctrines. Thus, the churches in his crusades were able to work together for evangelism though they may not be able to practically worship and carry out church life together on a local, weekly basis.

A final tier of doctrines that can be identified are theological issues that are not clearly defined by Scripture and have had widely varied perspectives among the church throughout history. These are matters that even people who are perfectly comfortable worshipping together within a church may not have complete agreement on. For example, one’s views on the timing of the rapture may fit into this category.

Adapting these tiers in practical terms, it is possible to see how particular Christian beliefs can be categorized in order to serve as a guide to when and how to work with others of differing positions. Using the example of baptism, the belief that baptism is vital to the Christian faith is essential; the import of baptism is secondary (whether it is a sign of covenant or personal faith); and the manner of baptism (sprinkled, poured over, or immersed) is tertiary. All three levels are important, but they vary as to their impact on how Christians are able to work together.

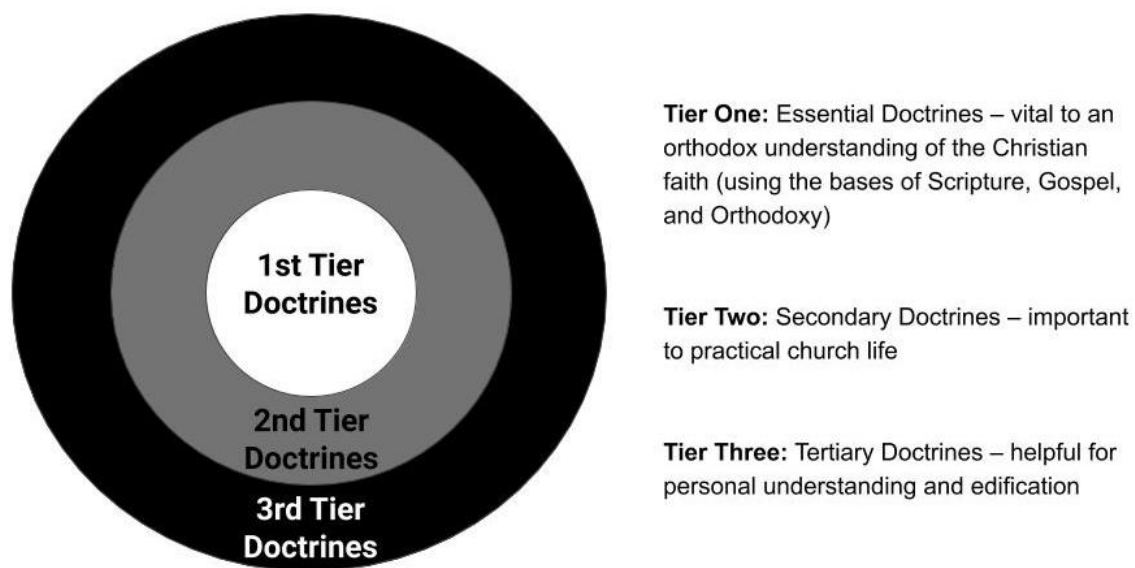


Figure 1. Three Tiers of Doctrine

Acknowledging and applying these tiers of doctrine provides a practical and workable means of engaging in cooperative partnerships with Christians and churches of various backgrounds. This approach allows believers in Christ to functionally work together for the shared value of mission/evangelism while still acknowledging certain differences and distinctives among Christians that may, at this point in time, keep them from carrying out local church ministry in the same manner. The first tier provides the grid by which to carry out the fundamental task of the

church, which is to make disciples of Jesus. Furthermore, what supplies clarity of content for the first tier (essential doctrines) are the three bases of unity presented above.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the four-fold missional strategy of this project has been outlined against the backdrop of biblical teaching and example and shown to be not only theologically sound but practically necessary to the effectiveness of the church carrying out its mission. The greatest theological and practical obstacle of this strategy is how Christians and churches can cooperate for mission in light of their doctrinal and denominational differences. Therefore, providing biblical bases of unity that many Christians can agree on and utilizing a tiered system of theological prioritization, the groundwork has been laid for carrying out the missional strategy successfully, in spite of the challenges at hand.

The next chapter will outline various writers who have been helpful to the development of these biblical themes and the practical application of them in today's current context.

CHAPTER THREE

RESOURCE REVIEW FOR NETWORKING CREATIVE MISSIONAL MINISTRIES

Introduction

There are four themes that have arisen in this project in light of the four missional challenges and four missional response strategies. These themes include mission, cooperation, contextualization, and multiplication. Each theme has been written about extensively in church planting literature, but this chapter will highlight the key writers that provided the greatest insight and influence in the development of this project.

Concerning mission, this chapter will look at the works of Timothy Keller; concerning, cooperation: John Frame; concerning contextualization: George Barna, Neil Cole, and Brian Sanders; concerning multiplication: Todd Wilson, Dave Ferguson, and Alan Hirsch. An overview of what these authors have written will be presented, followed by some takeaways and cautions for missional practitioners, and concluding with how the insights of these authors have been applied to this thesis-project.

The Theme of Mission

Key Author: Timothy Keller

Overview

Perhaps the best starting point for considering the church in relation to its mission in present-day America is to examine the writing of author and retired pastor Timothy Keller. Keller spent a few decades planting and pastoring a thriving, multi-campus evangelical church in New

York City (Redeemer Church) and developing a church planting agency (Redeemer City to City)¹ for developing missional leaders in cities throughout the globe. Keller's book, *Center Church*, is his textbook presentation on church planting and lays a solid foundation for the fact that the church must be on mission in the culture. He divides the subject into three areas: gospel, city, and movement, and each area is presented along a continuum in which there is a balance that must be sought and maintained.

In a context where the gospel can either be over-simplified or misrepresented, Keller provides clarity on what the gospel is and what it does.² He shows that the gospel is not mere advice but is the life-changing "biblical good news of how you can get right with God" through Jesus Christ as well as bringing "the biblical good news of what God will fully accomplish in history through the salvation of Jesus."³ The gospel is not single-faceted but incorporates various biblical strands as part of its message, including "home/exile, Yahweh/covenant, and kingdom;"⁴ therefore, it is more than a one-size-fits-all presentation.⁵ Next, he shows that the gospel affects everything and is foundational to the entire Christian life. In his words,

The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of the Christian life. It is inaccurate to think the gospel is what saves non-Christians, and then Christians mature by trying hard to live according to biblical principles. It is more accurate to say we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by

1. Information on this organization available at: <https://redeemercitytocity.com/resources>.

2. Another good treatment of gospel clarification and contextualization is found in the book by Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel*, which presents various strands of gospel theology and how those should be applied according to the audience.

3. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 30.

4. Keller, *Center Church*, 41.

5. Keller, 44.

believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on (see Rom. 12:1–2; Phil. 1:6; 3:13–14).⁶

Keller goes on to talk about the need for and means of gospel renewal (chapter 4), which can be experienced on a personal and corporate level (revival),⁷ and shows what true gospel renewal looks like and how to pursue biblical gospel renewal (cf. chapters 5 and 6).

The next section of Keller’s volume deals with the important theological concept of how the gospel intersects with the surrounding culture (the city).⁸ This involves a detailed treatment on the subject of gospel contextualization and city vision. A key component of his view is that the city (the centerpiece of culture) is neither to be completely rejected or accepted. It has both aspects that reflect the image and goodness of God (though common grace) as well as aspects that are in opposition to God (in need of saving grace). There are areas where the church must challenge the culture but does so best by valuing and utilizing good aspects of the culture. He says, “Our criticism of the culture will have no power to persuade unless it is based on something that we can affirm in the beliefs and values of that culture. We can challenge some of the wrong things they believe from the foundation of those right things they believe.”⁹ This, he argues, is what Paul does in Acts 17 where “he quotes pagan sources that teach the idea that God is the source of all existence and life” but then “challenges idolatry by showing that it is *inconsistent* with the pagans’ own (and better)

6. Keller, *Center Church*, 48.

7. Keller, 54.

8. The term *culture* can be defined as the collective values, norms of behavior, intellectual ideas, and artistic expressions that are part of a particular society. It is shaped and impacted by the history, language, and shared experience of a group of people in a particular place (i.e. country or region of a country). It is essentially a summarizing term for the general traits of a societal context in which the church conducts ministry.

9. Keller, *Center Church*, 124.

impulses about God.”¹⁰ This balanced approach is characteristic of Keller’s mediating posture towards the city. He goes on to show that the city provides an opportunity for gospel expansion and outlining some ways Christians can relate to the city: develop appreciative attitudes toward the city, become a dynamic counterculture where they live, and be a community radically committed to the good of their city as a whole.¹¹

In all of this Keller is arguing that cities are ideal places for gospel penetration and transformation of a culture because of their size and cultural influence. So, the church possesses the gospel message, and the city is the context in which the gospel message must be brought to bear.

The third and final section of Keller’s volume contains chapters on how the church is to functionally operate on mission. This incorporates the movement dynamic of the church as it takes the gospel into the culture. The discussion is outlined by missional community, integrative ministry, and movement dynamics. Keller provides a helpful discussion on where the term *missional* originated as a term “to convey the teaching of Karl Barth about the action of God in the world”¹² and how it is being incorporated into church theology and practice today, as seen in the book *Missional Church*, by Leslie Newbigin. Keller applies the principle of being missional saying it means being evangelistic, incarnational, contextual, and reciprocal as well as communal.¹³ He then fleshes out how the church can be effectively missional in the present-day context.

The final part of the book lays out a vision for taking the concepts of mission in relation to the culture through the implementation of missional church practices and replicating efforts through

10. Keller, *Center Church*, 124–125.

11. Keller, 169–172.

12. Keller, 250.

13. Keller, 256–258.

a church-planting movement. He lays out a case for why there needs to be church plants rather than utilizing the existing church landscape. His final chapter concludes with the concept of a “gospel ecosystem” within a city, which includes a wide variety of endeavors (all started and sustained through local church effort) in order to effectively carry out the gospel mission of the church in a full-orbed manner (see chart below).

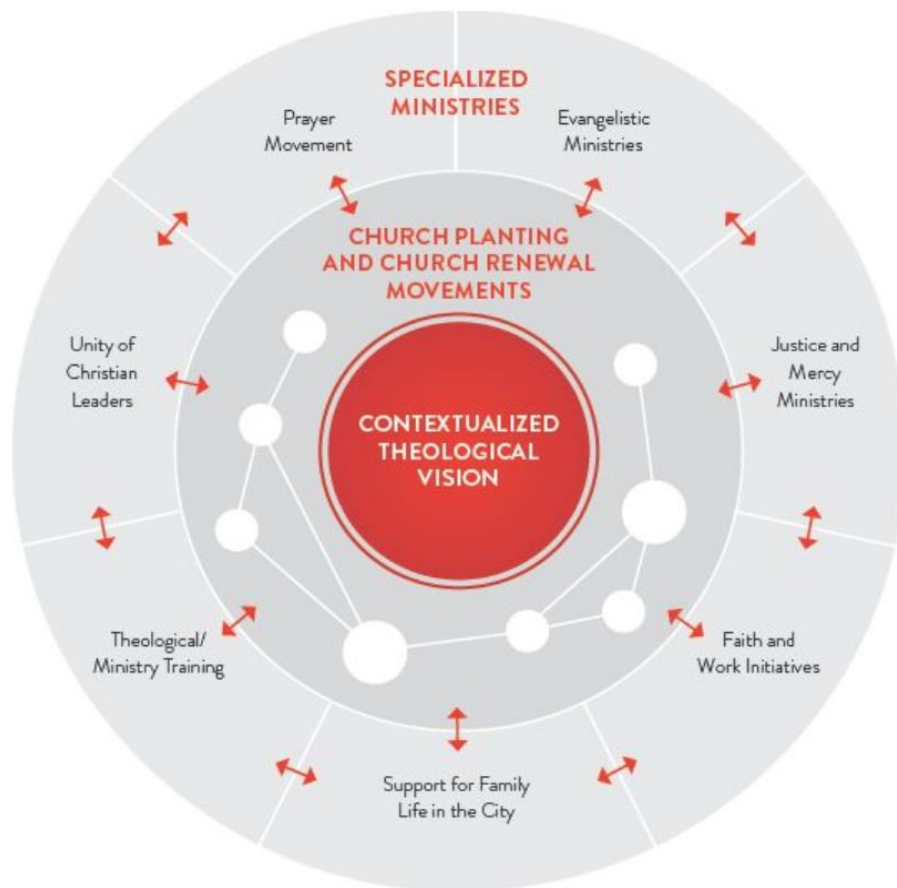


Figure 2. Timothy Keller’s “Gospel Ecosystem”¹⁴

Keller is a key author because He provides so much overview and integration of many other authors and strands of biblical and theological information. His work *Center Church* is perhaps

14. Keller, *Center Church*, 375.

currently the best primer on the church on mission for church planters in a western setting. It is an important work because it both reminds church leaders of the vitality of being on gospel mission but also frames the mission in terms of the present-day post-Christian setting of the west, where there are new questions the church must answer in relation to gospel mission.

Takeaways for Church on Mission

There are three takeaways which can be highlighted from Keller's work. First, the church has something that the culture desperately needs: the life-changing and culture-shifting message of the gospel. Because the gospel is so powerful, because of the plight of the world, and because of the mission given by Christ, the church should be focused on bringing the gospel into the world. The church needs to be a missionary endeavor, not simply a place for Christians to gather. (services that communicate the gospel; e.g. preaching to the unchurched; activities that demonstrate the gospel) Gospel renewal is what provides true hope in a world of doubt, despair, and darkness.

Also, in relation to this, the church on mission is neither in combat nor compromise with the culture. Keller ably and thoroughly demonstrates the balance that is needed between being under-adapted, where all the church does is challenge everything within the culture, and over-adapted, where all the church does is support the trends of the culture. Particularly helpful is his utilization of Scripture to show that the city (of man) is something the church must simultaneously bless and challenge.

Finally, the church must both contextualize gospel ministry while remaining true to the message of the gospel. Without the true gospel, the church really has nothing to offer, but without contextualization, the gospel is never really offered to the culture.

The next element of mission is that of movement. Not only was the word (message) of Christ being preached by Jesus' followers, it was being spread. The Great Commission itself says that Christians are to make disciples "as they are going." In Acts, Jesus explicitly says that His witnesses are to take the gospel from their local place of Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth. And this is exactly what the disciples sought to do, spreading the word of Christ wherever they went, though sometimes being brought to new places because of persecution. The book of Acts, of course, highlights the missionary activity of Paul, who was an early church planter and demonstrates the mission carried out through movement. The church in America, largely due to the past Christianization of the culture, often does not operate on the premise of movement. It tends to be seen as a static entity, and the culture can take it or leave. But Keller powerfully demonstrates the vision, the need, and the power of movement and how that can engage and shape a culture that is not Christian (in America's case, post-Christian).

Cautions

Keller's work is marked by the concept of balance, which he highlights extensively. The challenge comes in that fact that achieving balance is easier said than done. In fact, most people think they are balanced, while unwittingly veering to one side. Therefore, though wonderful in concept, our evaluation of what balance is must always be compared with Scripture. In Scripture, for example, we see that at times the church was very much at odds and persecuted by the culture (Acts – Paul in Ephesus). Perhaps it could even be shown that compared with Scripture Keller leans too much on the side of cultural accommodation. Nevertheless, his writing is a good corrective to those who are overly combative and isolationist in regard to the culture, as this is also can become a distortion of New Testament teaching.

The Theme of Cooperation

Key Author: John Frame

Overview

John Frame has dealt uniquely with the issue of denominations by writing a treatise on the subject. He essentially declares that denominations are a result of sin.¹⁵ This does not mean that being in a denomination is a sin; rather, it makes the point that all of the divisions and labels among the body of Christ are a result of sin among certain people at some point. It is not God's will for the body to be divided. Therefore, Frame writes to both bring attention to the issue and to outline a pathway back toward unity among Christians.

Frame, being a well-versed theologian, does a thorough job of demonstrating the biblical groundwork for his views on unity. The first part of the book presents the biblical case for church unity, including a survey of various approaches to church polity. The first is congregational, which emphasizes autonomy of the local church and utilizes church member governance. The second is episcopal, which utilizes a leader (bishop) over churches in a particular geographical region. The third is Presbyterian, which incorporates having leaders over various size groups within the church (tens, hundreds, thousands, and so on) Though coming at it from a Presbyterian perspective himself, he shows that people have biblical and/or historical bases for each of these approaches , but that regardless of one's view, the pursuit of unity will optimize any form of church government.¹⁶ He

15. John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion* (orig. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990; available at <https://frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/FrameJohnEvangelicalReunion1991.pdf>), 23.

16. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, 16–18.

concludes: “So all three of the major views of church government among Christians require for their best implementation the organizational unity of the church and the elimination of denominations.”¹⁷

Frame’s concept of unity, it should be noted, is not a form of ecumenism trumping all other doctrine. He is even critical of ecumenical theologians that are biblically unsound.¹⁸ His criteria for identifying a true church includes “the true preaching of the word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the diligent exercise of church discipline”.¹⁹ Therefore, while he would advocate to “merge with all who love the Lord and who demonstrate that love by a profession of faith made credible by their lives,” this would not include people and groups that are in serious error biblically, including the Roman Catholic Church (in its present state) and liberal Protestant denominations.²⁰ However, Frame does not let the complications and realities of the church world today to preclude the effort to pursue biblical unity. Past ecumenical efforts may have been flawed but Frame would regard this as no justification for abandoning the pursuit of unity altogether. In his view, a truly scriptural church is a unified church, and a church contented to be hopelessly splintered is categorically unbiblical.

Aside from making a strong biblical case for pursuing church unity, Frame also powerfully articulates the negative case against the status quo of denominationalism. He outlines many problematic issues that are due to or exacerbated by the existence of denominations. Perhaps surprisingly, he points out that denominations have cultivated less purity in the church because there is a lack of cohesive oversight and discipline among church members. People can hop from church

17. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, 18.

18. Frame, 37.

19. Along with a Great Commission focus and being characterized by love. Cf. Frame, 105, 111, 112.

20. Frame, 113.

to church without any accountability to an overarching leadership structure. Denominationalism also promotes unhealthy competition, vying against other local churches for the same people. These are just a couple of the many serious issues that Frame attributes to the present system of a divided church.

For the purposes of this project, what is most pertinent is Frame's discussion of how denominational differences are peripheral when juxtaposed with the gap between the church and the lost world. Frame present various beautiful examples of how Christians of different backgrounds find it natural to work together when engaging those who do not believe the gospel, such as a Presbyterian military chaplain who was excited to partner with an Assemblies of God chaplain.²¹ Furthermore, he powerfully demonstrates that the only way to reach the vast numbers of lost people is if all denominations succeed at planting many churches.²² Therefore, there should be support and cooperation rather than competition among evangelistic, church planting efforts.

Finally, Frame moves from presenting the theological case for unity to a practical discussion of how to actually work toward unity in the present-day setting. Several chapters cover various themes necessary for tackling this endeavor, but Frame also remains realistic about how much unity can be achieved at this point in time. His closing chapter provide short-term goals and a list of 34 steps for working toward unity, including "[cultivating] new ways of thinking. . . about the church," getting involved in situations where you will interact and work with other Christians from different traditions, and "[seeking] to turn doctrinal debates into occasions for the whole church, or as much of it as possible, to study together."²³

21. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, 54.

22. Frame, 57–58.

23. Frame, 134–137.

Takeaways for Church Cooperation

What makes Frame's work so potent is that it is not only theologically tight, and therefore unignorable, but is also realistically practical. It provides a reasonable pathway to implement the very concepts that were established from Scripture. Though many have not responded or even noted Frame's work, there are a few takeaways that the church today should truly consider.

First, disunity is not ideal. Frame rightly challenges those who are content or even in favor of maintaining status quo in regard to denominations. He ably shows that it is neither biblical nor spiritually healthy for the church to be content with division.

Second, unity is an important theological concept and biblical priority that must not be ignored. Not only is division unhealthy, but unity is of utmost importance to fulfilling the biblical vision of church and fulfilling God's mission for the church in the world. It is hard to believe how much of evangelical Christianity is content and even seems to favor current divisions even though the biblical vision of the church clearly identifies unity as an ideal and integral aspect of God's plan. This is reflected, for example, in the words of Jesus, who prayed for the unity of His people (cf. John 17:20–21) and Paul, who speaks extensively of the reality of spiritual unity and the need to maintain that unity (cf. Ephesians 4:1–6, 11–13).

Finally, unity is not a lost cause. This is what is most encouraging about Frame's work. After doing the hard work of showing how the church is falling short in its current state, Frame shows that it is possible to work toward unity, even while retaining justifiable doctrinal concerns and acknowledging the probable current limitations on how much governmental unity can be achieved.

Cautions

There are two cautions to be made concerning Frame's work. The first is to note that Frame is coming at the issue from a Presbyterian perspective. Though he does a fantastic job of representing various perspectives on church polity, his ideal for how the church is ultimately structured is of a centralized, hierarchical government, though not an Episcopalian version of this. Two issues with this ideal are that, first, it is problematic to achieve a completely unified church government on a global scale. Second, it is questionable whether this is the biblical ideal for church government. The biblical data on this issue is fairly sparse and perhaps inconclusive. Frame utilizes a hermeneutic that incorporates Old Testament prerogatives on structure (i.e. how Israel was organized and governed), but the New Testament does not clearly portray the church as structured in this manner. Yes, churches came together and aided one another (unity and centralization), but there was no consistent meeting of global leaders or central control over every aspect of local church life from higher authorities (autonomy and decentralization). There seems to be a balance of centralization and decentralization, authority from leaders and a sense of collective authority. While unity must be pursued, for biblical and practical reasons, it appears best to pursue unity with a side-to-side approach rather than a top-down approach.²⁴

A second caution is concerning how Frame looks at particular issues. He separates doctrinal disputes into two categories: tolerable (not meriting separation) or intolerable (meriting separation). One example is baptism, where he admits that he would not see this as an intolerable issue, but others would. This reveals a bit of a fault line in his quest for pursuing unity, at least in terms of how

24. Examples of some works that address the issue of organizational structure in relation to decentralization are *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* by General Stanley McChrystal and *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* by Ori Brafman and Rod. A. Beckstrom.

he envisions it. It seems that the present doctrinal and ecclesiastical landscape is such that the complexity of issues merits really approaching matters on a three-tiered system (outlined in chapter 2 of this project), where unity can be achieved for mission if there is agreement on first-tier doctrines, but ecclesiastical unity cannot be fully achieved if there is disagreement on second-tier doctrines. This is essentially how Frame's approach plays out, but Frame tends to present matters more simplistically and idealistically at times.

The Theme of Contextualization

Key Authors: George Barna, Neil Cole, Brian Sanders

Aside from the call to multiplication, there is also a growing pocket of the church clamoring for a truly missional expression of church. This means that the church must incarnate the mission of God in Christ among the people of the culture rather than function as an institution apart from culture.

Overview

George Barna laid the groundwork for some of this thinking in the provocative book *Revolution*, which was met with a certain degree of criticism. In this book he reveals that the present spiritual landscape in America is characterized by more and more Christians who are leaving the traditional congregational approach to church and moving toward alternative forms of spirituality and faith community relations, such as house churches, cyber-church communities, and mini-movements that are outside of an established local church.²⁵ There is a growing sense of disappointment with the way church functions and a longing for a vital spirituality that displays

25. Examples are found in: George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (U.S.: Tyndale Publishers), Chapter 1.

faith and acts with Christ-like motivation in everyday life. Barna is not rejecting this move away from standard forms of church but is rather calling for people to become part of this new movement that he believes will revitalize the shape of Christianity in America.²⁶ Toward the end of the book, he encourages local church members to “learn from the Revolutionaries,” to “seek ways in which your church can add to the Revolution,” to “reflect on what it means to belong to a church—your church,” and to “figure out how to create more Revolutionaries among those who are not aligned with the Christian faith community.”²⁷ Overall, Barna is not so much a practical writer on the subject of contextualizing church, but he is adept at identifying and describing trends that can help the church to think about a post-modern context and encourage church leaders to be open to a certain measure of change in systems thinking.

One writer from the church planting world that puts practical implementation to the kinds of ideas that Barna is talking about is Neil Cole, who has led an “organic” house church movement and has written in favor of completely restructuring church ministry. This is reflected in his not so subtly titled book *Church 3.0*, where he makes an outright call and case for reconfiguring church systems that give greater weight to small, family-like churches that can replicated easily and quickly. He says the church has gone through different upgrades in church history and must be upgraded to “version 3.0.”²⁸ Below is a chart from the book detailing the upgrade changes.

26. Another example of this trend is seen in the work *Decentralized* by Bo Chancey, pastor of Manchester Christian Church, which calls for seeing church as being outside of large church gatherings and entering into the new age that is being brought about through internet technology.

27. Barna, *Revolution*, loc. 1523–1540.

28. Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2010), 4–9.

	Church 2.0	Church 3.0
Seating when gathered	<i>Rows</i>	<i>Circles</i>
Environment	<i>Anonymous</i>	<i>Intimate</i>
Leadership source	<i>Institutions of higher learning</i>	<i>Harvest fields</i>
Growth	<i>Addition</i>	<i>Multiplication</i>
Results	<i>An audience is attracted</i>	<i>A spiritual army is mobilized</i>
Ministry practitioners	<i>The ordained</i>	<i>The ordinary</i>
Resources	<i>Imported to the harvest</i>	<i>Discovered in the harvest</i>
Primary leadership role	<i>Pastoral teacher</i>	<i>APEST team</i>
Learning lab	<i>Classroom-based education</i>	<i>Trench-based education</i>
Cost	<i>Expensive</i>	<i>Inexpensive</i>
Ministry setting	<i>The meeting place</i>	<i>The marketplace</i>
Success	<i>Full seating capacity</i>	<i>Full sending capacity</i>
Church posture	<i>Passive: "Y'all come!"</i>	<i>Active: "We all go!"</i>
Attraction	<i>Felt need programming</i>	<i>Obvious life transformation</i>
Model of church life	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Family</i>

Figure 3. Neil Cole's "Contrasting Church 2.0 with Church 3.0"

It must be noted, though, that Cole is not unconcerned about reaching large numbers or even having organization on a large scale, he is mainly calling for systems of discipleship that are most effective in our current cultural setting. Some examples of this are being missional rather than attractional,²⁹ using an APEST team model of church leadership,³⁰ and using simple, easily replicated discipleship systems.³¹ Also, though he has criticism of traditional church forms, he is not rejecting them outright in order to start churches that are opposed to the existing church. He intends to move even existing church forms to what he considers a more biblical, healthy form of church.

29. Cole, *Church 3.0*, 47.

30. Cole, 144.

31. Seen in Cole's discipleship materials (e.g. Life Transformation Group cards), available at <https://www.cmaresources.org/>.

Another author and practitioner who, like Neil Cole, has sought to bring the current cultural and spiritual realities to bear upon how church ministry is structured is Brian Sanders. His recent work, *Underground Church*,³² outlines his ministry's approach to missional engagement via alternative church structures. Essentially, Sander's approach is structured around small missional communities (micro-churches) that focus on various cultural elements and needs within the city, seeking to bring the presence and witness of Christ into various settings within the community. This trend is being replicated as *Tampa Underground* leaders train other networking leaders to help incubate and multiply missional communities in other cities.³³

In some ways, the shared component of Barna, Cole, and Sander's writings is what might be termed a radical contextualization in light of the present post-modern landscape in America. It is a functional response to the decline of the centralized power of the church and other traditional elements within the culture. The best way for the church to adapt, say these writers, is to become a different kind of structure altogether, which is seen in their church models and in like-minded models that are being birthed throughout the country.³⁴

Takeaways for Church Contextualization

What these authors are writing about and seeking to deal with are two different realities in the American church today. The first is that the culture we live in today is in decreasing alignment with church values and perspectives, so there is the challenge of connecting and relating to the

32. Brian D. Sanders, *Underground Church: A Living Example of the Church in its Most Potent Form* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

33. Information and training resources are at: <https://www.undergroundnetwork.org/>.

34. E.g., note the various networks listed throughout the country at the Underground Network website (<https://www.undergroundnetwork.org/>). Also, note the networked approach of the Fresh Expressions ministry at <https://freshexpressionsus.org/about/>.

culture. Previous forms of church tend to reach church people, but there are many people left unreached by current church practices.

Second, to reach the culture there must not only be missional engagement but a vibrant form of spirituality that has the presence and power to demonstrate the reality of who Christ is to the world. Current church practices may seem like Christianized concerts and conferences rather than a Spirit-empowered movement of Jesus followers who live like Him in the world.

The main takeaway in light of these observations is that there are potentially forms of doing church that can be adopted to facilitate both better discipleship (Spirit-empowered Christianity) and interaction with non-believers (missional engagement). This will involve new ways of thinking and a different approach church configuration. It will require conviction and courage to help the church reconsider and alter some of its core practices that are widespread in the American church today.

Cautions

Of all of the subjects covered in this chapter, this is perhaps the most controversial because these authors are directly critiquing and challenges the very nature of how church is conducted. This is certain to step on many toes and raise much defense, and to some degree for good reason. There are a couple of cautions that must be seriously considered in reference to what these authors are advocating.

The first caution is while these authors question present church practices, their own writings must be held up to the scrutiny of Scripture. No matter how sincere someone's desire is to be the best expression of church possible, it is spiritually necessary to remain biblical in an understanding of ecclesiology (what the church is) and polity (how the church is governed). It is easy to play fast and loose with Scripture in areas that do not bolster the author's paradigm. The questions arise: In

the push to become more integrated with culture, are we beginning to allow the culture to dictate what church is to some degree? In seeking to correct certain extremes, are we veering toward alternative extremes?

As mentioned previously, the Bible presents both a centralized and decentralized view of ecclesiology, as well as a balance between the authority of select leaders and the believers as a whole. These authors are pushing toward decentralization and away from hierarchical authority, but the Scripture presents the church as a body that is actually and not just theoretically connected, and that is led by God-ordained leaders who have met certain qualifications. This is not a question of traditional versus contemporary expressions of church; these matters are also a question of faithfulness to God's wise design of the church as expressed in Scripture.

This brings up a second caution, which is that in an effort to correct and improve church practices, it is easy to think one has come up with a system that is better than anything before. But it is never wise (and certainly not humble) to reject everything from the past. There is always much to learn from history, including church history, and to varying degrees these authors seem to overlook this fact. Certainly, there are some tremendous lessons that can be learned from what these writers are saying, but the caution is to realize that some of their impulses may lead to other weaknesses and problems that current church structures are better suited to deal with.

The Theme of Multiplication

Key authors: Steve Addison, Ed Stetzer, Warren Bird, Todd Wilson, Dave Ferguson

Overview

There is a growing call for multiplication to be an integral element of church planting strategy in twenty-first century America.³⁵ This call born out of the recognition that church planting movements are the key to impacting culture in vastly unreached people groups. One work that is indicative of this reality and provides groundwork in understanding the principles of disciple-making multiplication is Steve Addison's *Movements that Change the World*.³⁶ Addison's work reveals that Christianity has always thrived and grown because God has brought about revitalizing and mobilizing movements among His people throughout the Church's history. Addison recounts the details of various Christian movements, identifies five key components (white-hot faith, commitment to a cause, contagious relationships, rapid mobilization, and adaptive methods), and shows how these elements can be incorporated in order to foster new movements among God's people for the spread of the gospel. Addison's work is foundational to the study of church planting movements in history and throughout the world today, and thus provides a primer for the subject of church multiplication (as opposed to church addition strategies).

Addison lays groundwork on the subject of multiplication movements. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird build on this foundation and provide a motivational call for church planters to implement multiplicative strategies in *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*.³⁷ The strength of Stetzer and Bird's work is that it presents historical and present-day case

35. This is seen, for example, in the Exponential organization's work (<https://exponential.org/>), the SEND Institute's work (<https://www.sendinstitute.org/church-planting-networks-focusing-multiplying-churches/>), and books such as *How to Multiply Your Church* by Ralph Moore, *The Multiplying Church* by Bob Roberts Jr., and *Multiply* by Francis Chan.

36. Steve Addison, *Movements that Change the World: Five Keys to Spreading the Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009, 2011).

37. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2010).

studies of how church multiplication operates, particularly in the context of North America. Present day examples and models they provide include Ralph Moore's system of church planting, house churches through Church Multiplication Associates and multi-site paradigms, such as Mars Hill Church in Seattle and Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City. This material builds on Addison's work and provides some guidance for practitioners in the context of the United States.

A very good synthesis of the preceding concepts is found in *Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church Field Guide*, by Todd Wilson and Dave Ferguson with Alan Hirsch. This is essentially a small manual for assessing where one's current church ministry falls on the scale of multiplication and how to move toward a fully multiplicative model for discipleship and church planting. Ironically, the place to begin when it comes to multiplication is by focusing on small addition systems: "micro-addition, adding one disciple at a time."³⁸ From there, the authors move to systems for micro-multiplication: "disciples making other disciples."³⁹ These two elements compose the "disciple-making crosshairs" of their strategy. They then move to the "capacity building" systems,⁴⁰ including macro-addition (e.g. new campuses or new ministries),⁴¹ and macro-multiplication (continually sending people to start new churches that start new churches).⁴² Here is a diagram that visualizes these concepts:⁴³

38. Todd Wilson and Dave Ferguson, *Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church Field Guide* (U.S.: Exponential Resources, 2015), 48.

39. Wilson and Ferguson, *Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church Field Guide*, 53.

40. Wilson and Ferguson, 57–58.

41. Wilson and Ferguson, 58–59.

42. Wilson and Ferguson, 62–64.

43. Wilson and Ferguson, 47.

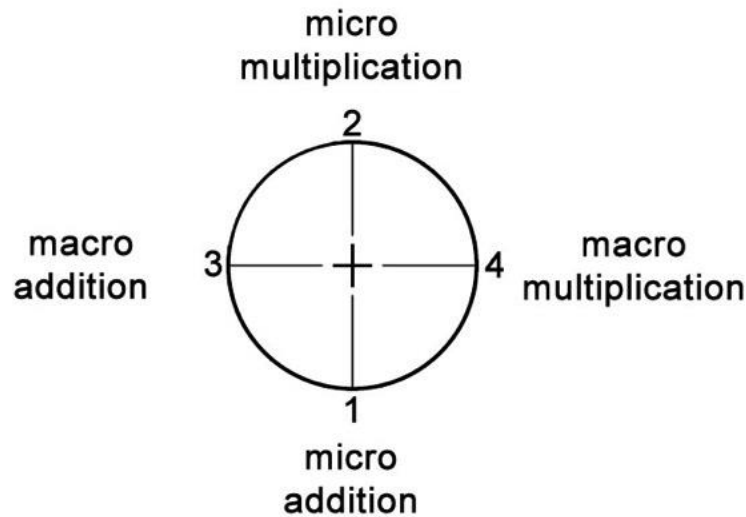


Figure 4. Wilson and Ferguson’s “Crosshairs of Kingdom Growth”

The overall point of this little volume is that it is necessary to incorporate all four of these elements (“crosshairs”) in order to be fully functioning as a “level five,” church multiplying ministry.

Takeaways for Church Multiplication

The authors in the preceding section reveal three important concepts for gospel planting work in highly unreached settings. First, the way to impact an entire population with the spread of the gospel is through a multiplication movement; therefore, it is important to develop multiplication-oriented mindset and strategies. This is how Christianity went from few followers to a movement that changed the world in the first century.

Second, it is vital while thinking on a large-scale level of multiplication to give great attention to the small-scale endeavor of thoroughly discipling others one at a time. As Wilson and Ferguson point out concerning churches that focus on heavily large-scale growth, “The result? Though we increase our effectiveness at breaking organizational growth barriers and adding to our

numbers, unfortunately we may be building bigger and bigger holding tanks for cultural Christians.”⁴⁴ Churches grow large but not deep, and it can perpetuate a very docile version of true, vibrant, culture-changing Christianity.

Third, as small-scale addition strategies are implemented and utilized, it is also necessary to complement these discipleship activities with scalable, capacity-building strategies. There must be both a focus on one-to-one discipleship but also a means of organizing and growing discipleship communities into replicating groups that in turn replicate other groups.

Cautions

One point of caution on the issue of disciple-making multiplication is that while it is certainly desirable to produce a compounding measure of growth in the church, it is questionable whether multiplication is a cause or a result of spiritual renewal. It may be that what is really being observed in other cultures is the right spiritual conditions and work of God that results in the rapid spread and acceptance of the gospel. It is good, then, to pray and even prepare for this type of harvest, but no human strategy of multiplication can bring about a cultural change in and of itself. (This might be confusing the methods with the source of multiplication.) Of course, these authors are not saying that this is so, but their emphasis on multiplication strategies can easily cause practitioners to overly focus and rely on human effort rather than the work of God. This point is simply a reminder that missionaries to a culture must first and foremost and continually pray for God to work in His field and to send more laborers. This must take precedent over any strategy and is what ultimately brings fruit. After all, God’s laborers plant and water, but God gives the increase.

44. Wilson and Ferguson, *Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church Field Guide*, 66.

Conclusion

These authors have covered the four themes that undergird this thesis-project: mission, cooperation, contextualization, and multiplication. This thesis-project has been built upon many of the core principles outlined by these authors. The foundation of the project is based upon the notion that the church is required to be on mission from Christ and that the cultural moment of upper New England calls for a church that is obedient to this mission. Second, this project rests on the premise that church cooperation beyond the scope of present denominations is not only preferable but indispensable to the mission of the church. Cooperation on this scale is also a more faithful representation of Jesus' vision for His people and how that would reflect toward the outside world. Third, this project seeks to apply biblical and practical principles of contextualization so that the gospel is faithfully, boldly, and accurately communicated to the present culture of upper New England in a manner that will not be ignored or misunderstood. Contextualization also represents the incarnational reality of the ministry of Jesus and that He has called His people to go into the world as light and salt. Finally, this project assumes that the most strategically advantageous and biblically faithful approach to mission is one that incorporates multiplicative principles—that the church is meant to be a movement that grows and reverberates throughout communities. This is what has impacted cultures throughout history and throughout the world and also is needed desperately in a part of the United States that is on the forefront of a trend away from God toward secularization.

The first chapter revealed the need for these concepts, and these last two chapters have presented a theological and academic case for the implementation of the principles of mission, cooperation, contextualization, and multiplication. The next chapter will outline in detail how these principles have been applied to the rural upper New England context of Claremont, NH and the

surrounding region and present an example that might be utilized and adapted in other contexts that share certain characteristics.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT FOR NETWORKING CREATIVE MISSIONAL MINISTRIES

Introduction

In spring of 2015, the Connect Center first opened its space at 46 Opera House Square, in the center of downtown Claremont, NH. In the fall, a Grand Opening two-day event was conducted, which brought many people from churches and the community, including the city manager, who thanked the Connect Center Director for this initiative and even personally gave a donation. At that time, the Connect Center began providing space for classes and groups (such as financial peace and marriage classes) and continued walk-in hours for community members where they could sit down and talk with a Connect Center assistant about needs, find information about various church and community resources, and be assisted in acquiring needed resources (see Appendix E for sample promo).

This was the start to what is now a three-year endeavor to engage in the four-fold strategy described in this project: incubating missional activity, networking church resources, cultivating discipleship practices, providing optimal accessibility to members of the community. The following material will describe in detail how the Connect Center has carried out these initiatives.

Initial Organization

This section outlines the initial concept of the structure of the Connect Center as found in the original concept document. It must be acknowledged that not all of the leadership organizational roles were implemented. During the Connect Center's existence, there have been

a director, administrative coordinator, and assistants (as outlined below), but the following material shows the original organization concept design.

Purpose

The Connect Center exists to provide space for network churches to work together, offer events and classes, and connect area residents with the various resources and programs our churches offer.

Church Network

Local churches can become a formal part of the Connect Center initiative by signing on to core values and beliefs. This network does not hold authority over any church, nor does membership in the network imply endorsement of every aspect of other church ministries. Rather, it is a shared ministry initiative centered on primary Christian beliefs and the commitment to spread the gospel.

Administrative Team

The administrative team membership is open to people from the various network churches who have been recommended by their local church and have been accepted through the application process. The team will meet regularly for devotion time in God's Word, prayer for God's work in the community, and strategic planning for the Connect Center initiative.

Director (vision)

- In charge of promoting and overseeing the mission of the Connect Center
- Casts vision and garners support for the Connect Center through individual communication and group presentations
- Establishes connections in the community by offering resources, teaching seminars, inviting community members to the Connect Center for forums, etc.

- Implements team members and encourages them in their contributions

Administrative Coordinator (administration)

- Helps director carry out administrative tasks (overseeing team and assistants)
- Develops systems with others to run the organization
- Provides guidance and advice to the director
- Helps director with making church/community contacts and presentations

Staff Coordinator (training)

- Facilitates training of Connect Center assistants (both secretarial and counselor assistants)
 - e.g. role playing scenarios at the Connect Center
- Models the process of assisting community individuals
- Develops and maintains schedule of Connect Center personnel

Finance Coordinator (budgeting)

- Develops and keeps track of budget
- Oversees Connect Center bank account usage
- Implements donation and fundraising systems

Media & Promotion Coordinator (promotion)

- Creates artwork for the Connect Center and its promotional materials
- Designs promo cards, brochures, and media
- In charge of website/app development
- Develops promo sheets and slides for network churches

Connect Center Assistants

These are individuals who volunteer time during the week to help staff the Connect Center during business hours. They provide assistance to community members who are looking for information, support, or direction with a need that they have. They help to functionally connect the resources of our churches with the needs of individuals in the community.

- Catalog paperwork
- Print promotional materials
- Answer and direct telephone communication
- Update website and social media information

Connect Center Counselors

These are individuals who possess thorough knowledge in a particular area and provide community members with information and assistance through seminars or one-on-one guidance. Examples of counseling topics include financial peace, job sustainment, breaking addictions, and family care.

Core Values

Our values can be summed up in the word “care.” Our desire is to truly show concern for individuals in our community and provide care that will help to meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. The acronym C.A.R.E. spells out these values.

Community-oriented

Desiring to build the character and morale of our community through positive influence

Assisting

Seeking to help individuals to experience personal healing and growth

Relational

Developing relationships built upon trust and genuineness

Evangelical

Commitment to a Christian, gospel-based worldview

Foundational Beliefs

Orthodoxy

The historically affirmed doctrines Christianity (the trinity, the incarnation, resurrection, and return of Christ) are essential to our faith.

Scripture

The Bible is the inspired Word of God and the final authority for Christian belief and living.

Gospel

Salvation is not through any physical process or human effort but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Basic Statement of Faith

The Bible

We believe that the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible, inerrant Word of God and have the final say in spiritual matters. These Scriptures are the basis by which the Christian life can be understood and lived out.

God

We believe in the one true God, the Creator of all things, who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Humans

We believe that all humans are created in the image of God and are responsible to their Creator to honor, worship, and obey Him.

Sin

We believe that, through the Fall brought by Adam and Eve, the creation and humanity has been marred and is in need of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

Salvation

We believe that each person is by nature a sinner in need of a Savior, that salvation is in Jesus Christ, the result of God's grace by means of personal faith. It cannot be achieved or attained by human effort but is the result of God's work.

The Church

We believe that all those who have experienced the saving work of Christ have been baptized into His body, the church. The church is universal; it is not under the confines of a denomination or hierarchical entity. Local churches are a representation of the spiritual reality of God's people, and it is God's intention for followers of Christ to be part of a local church.

The Return of Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus will physically return to judge and rule, taking His place as rightful King over all.

The Eternal State

We believe that all people will one day be resurrected to eternal life in heaven or eternal death in hell.

Connect Center Concept Presentation

The following slides show the initial concepts that were presented to church leaders and members before the launch of the organization. The Connect Center founder visited various pastors one-on-one to share the vision and help create momentum and cooperation. A presentation was also made at Calvary Baptist Church, the sending congregation of the Connect Center director.



WHAT IT IS:

A network of like-minded churches with gospel mission reaching out to meet the needs of the community

Churches become part of the network by signing on to core values and beliefs

An administrative team is run by representatives from each network church

The launch pad for this initiative will be in a downtown location



THE ENVIRONMENT

A safe, warm, and inviting environment

A neutral space between community and church

A place for sharing information and inviting

A place where personal connections are made

A resource/administrative facility for the administrative team and community assistants

Event facility for communication and forming positive relationships





Figure 5. Connect Center Concept Presentation

Connect Center Implementation

The above presentation was initially shared at Calvary Baptist Church in the summer of 2014. After presenting to the church, talking with church leadership, and meeting with the church missions team, approval was given for the church to vote to make the Connect Center a new outreach ministry of Calvary Baptist Church, functioning with 501(c)(3) status through the church (under the Conservative Baptist Association). At the annual church business meeting in October 2014, the church voted in favor of establishing the Connect Center ministry. The mission team also added the Connect Center as a mission budget item, agreeing to give \$700 a month to help cover monthly costs of the Connect Center.

With the church approving to give financially through monthly missions giving and also giving offerings to provide for the start-up costs of the Connect Center, the way was paved to secure a location. A team of individuals that volunteered time to be part of the launch process helped with the search of a good location by visiting potential spaces with the founder. In January of 2015, an office space on Opera House Square in Claremont was secured as the initial location for the ministry. It functioned in this location until February of 2017, when it moved

across the square to its present location, adjacent to REMIX. The founder of the Connect Center also created a website and Facebook page for the organization before the official launch in fall of 2015.

Up to this point in time, the Connect Center has remained under the church's 501(c)(3) status, but this could potentially change. Other churches have not had an issue with this being a ministry of Calvary Baptist Church, and it has not impeded cooperation with other churches. Nevertheless, it may be advantageous for the Connect Center to conduct itself as an independent non-profit organization in order to be less burdensome to Calvary Baptist's ministry and to add consistency and effectiveness to its inter-church ministry mission.

Incubating Mission

The first initiative of the Connect Center is to incubate missional activity in the church. This is generally accomplished by connecting community members to existing church resources and tapping into new resources within the church for missional purposes. The Connect Center website provides information on different church resources and helps community members know more about what is available to them, including office space for them to come and gain assistance. The Connect Center also uses social media (i.e. Facebook) to promote and provide information about events and classes that churches are offering within the community. It essentially provides promotional activity for churches in the area on one platform.

The Connect Center also helps the church to tap into latent resources by working with individuals who are looking to initiate new missional activity. Below are two examples of how this has been carried out.

REMIX

REMIX is the brainchild of Jimmie Neilsen, a church member in the Claremont area who was given a vision and call from God to start this new ministry. Jimmie wanted to leave Claremont because of its many existing problems and challenges but God impressed on him that all the reasons he had for leaving are the very reasons that God wanted him to stay and start this ministry. Jimmie had been a professional DJ at one point in his life, and while on a conference trip in Hawaii, he saw a sign that simply said REMIX, and this birthed the idea that became a downtown ministry in Claremont. He says that a “remix” is a new take on an old song, which provides an analogy for how God takes a life and renews it for His purposes. The “remixed” life is defined by him as one that is: Renewed, Enriched, Missional, Inclusive, and Extreme. Jimmie’s ministry, then, is all about reaching people in Claremont so that they can experience the remixed life through the power of the gospel.

REMIX operates as a coffee bar social club, which is presently opened on Friday nights from 7:00 – 10:00 pm. He and his team beautifully renovated a storefront into a coffee house with a stage, mounted televisions, and various environments for sitting and socializing, including couches, tables and chairs, and the coffee bar with stools. He plays hip-hop style music in the background, and many nights it is simply a space for people in Claremont to hang out and interact. REMIX has a team of trained individuals who run the coffee bar but also interact with guests, and who are there to pray for the endeavor, minister to people, and provide an atmosphere of friendship and encouragement. It has greatly aided in providing positive social and entertainment space, especially for younger people in a rural area where there is not a lot to do and plenty of unhealthy forms of entertainment. On some Friday nights, REMIX hosts singers, comedians, and other events (e.g.

Coffee and Canvas, New Year's Eve Party), which adds variety and more opportunity for social engagement.

REMIX operates as a non-profit with a pay-it-forward model of business. Customers order items and can then pay the suggested donation, pay more in order to cover the cost for others, or pay little to nothing. This makes it possible even for people with very low income to enjoy high-quality coffee, tea, other drinks, and snacks. Any money collected above operating costs goes back into the community through donations to other outreach ministries and community organizations that exist to help the community.

The Connect Center has been a partner with REMIX, even moving to an adjacent location where the two storefront business are connected in the back via a hallway. This essentially creates a large ministry space that can share facility resources, such as meeting space, TVs, chairs, tables, and so on. The Connect Center also shares internet with REMIX, which provides good high-speed rates at a split cost for both organizations. The director of the Connect Center has also started a monthly event called REMIX After-Hours, which is a prayer and worship time for REMIX workers and anyone else who wants to join. This has fostered spiritual connections among attendees and a place to seek God on behalf of the city. REMIX offers third space for making connections in a secular community, and REMIX After-Hours brings that ministry into connection with worship and spiritual emphasis.

Through this partnership, the Connect Center has incubated missional activity by aiding and promoting the vision of REMIX, partnering and leveraging resources, and supplementing REMIX's main ministry avenue with an opportunity for worship and sharing the gospel corporately.

Shining Success

For several years, Shining Success operated out of Life Fellowship Foursquare Church in Charlestown, NH. It was created to provide consultation and professional outfits for women facing economic hardship. Shana Moody, the founder and director of this ministry, sought to empower women to find or improve career opportunities through encouraging them and helping them piece together a wardrobe that complements the way God has made them. This fosters a greater sense of self-esteem and confidence for women who have often been in challenging and discouraging situations. Being a Christian herself, this ministry also affords her the opportunity to share the love and message of Jesus with clients.

The difficulty for Shining Success operating out of the church location was that this was not very accessible to the target group, many of which do not have reliable means of transportation. This is where the Connect Center was able to cultivate missional optimization by providing storefront space for Shining Success in downtown Claremont, which is within walking distance for many of the clientele that this ministry is seeking to serve. When the Connect Center moved into space adjacent to REMIX, part of the plan was to share this space with Shining Success, which was enhanced by the fact that it has large storefront window space and was previously operating as a bridal shop. Therefore, it already had the existing necessities for running an outfitting organization, including windows for clothing displays, changing rooms, and plenty of closet space with long clothing racks. The front space has room for the Connect Center to operate a welcome area to fill out needs assessment forms and to display flyers and brochures about programs, organizations, and church resources. The back area has room for a conference/networking/classroom area, and a little office/hallway area that leads to REMIX.

This activity is a sign of God's work, and God blessed this initiative last year by providing an opportunity for these partnering ministries to be highlighted in an issue of New Hampshire Chronicle, which was aired on a major news network out of Manchester, NH. This is a snapshot of how ministry can be an incarnational presence in the community, causing many to take notice of a display of God's love.

Shining Success has been able to operate in a more accessible manner and even expand to include men's clothing and consultation because the Connect Center is providing downtown space, covering the vast majority of the rent. This is another example of missional optimization through partnering and how missional ideas can be birthed, shaped, and grow through mutually generous partnerships. Missional incubation is all about cultivating new ideas, giving permission and empowerment to their expression, and leveraging resources for their development and optimization.

Inspiring Cooperation

As seen above, incubating and enhancing missional activity best takes place in a cooperative and generous environment. Even if there is a desire to bring resources to a particular area of need, these resources are best leveraged and supplied through a larger system of sharing. Though this is obviously true in theory, there are many obstacles to partnership within the church world, including doctrinal differences, historical realities, and local issues involving the particular people and ministries of a given area. "Why can't we all just get along?" becomes a pertinent and difficult to answer question when dealing with actual churches in actual places.

In order to deal with these realities, the Connect Center goes to the root of the issue by focusing on the vital relationships affecting potential partnerships. A key strategy for networking and leveraging resources is to foster a good rapport among leaders and members of churches. There

are two main ways this has been approached through the Connect Center's efforts: visiting churches and bringing church leaders and congregations together.

Church Visits

The Director of the Connect Center has been afforded the opportunity to speak at different churches. When given the opportunity to speak, it has been proven effective to share a biblical message about mission and then to explain the concept of church networking for mission. Churches seem to agree in principle that it is biblical and most effective to work together for mission. Particularly in a highly unreached culture, many churches feel inadequate and fatigued at the spiritual and physical needs of the region, and it is often a breath of fresh air to consider the possible kingdom impact that can be accomplished through networked resources. Visiting churches is essentially a time of vision-casting and continuing to lay a groundwork for cooperative endeavors.

Church Leader and Congregation Gatherings

On top of going to churches, building a rapport among various groups happens by bringing people together. One very successful approach is conducting pastors' lunches and prayer times. Bringing church leaders together encourages them, helps them to see how they are alike in many of their desires and difficulties, and can provide an opportunity to build or re-establish trust. There was one instance of a pastor hurt by another church leader's actions finding an opportunity for reconciliation through this time together. Fellowship and prayer provide the optimal conditions for building and maintaining healthy spiritual relationships.

Though there are other ways in which pastors can experience the camaraderie of fellow ministers, often these opportunities are only afforded on a regular basis within a denomination. In

contrast, the Connect Center is doing the legwork of organizing meetings and is bringing leaders from various denominations together to be encouraged out of a shared mission location.

This not only provides refreshment but a true sense of togetherness as their churches engage in mission within the same community.

Not only has the Connect Center brought leaders together, it has brought church congregations together in the form of worship events. The first was in fall of 2016 on a Sunday evening. It was held at the youngest of the Claremont churches after they had just moved into a permanent building. There were five or more churches represented, with various churches providing an element of the evening, one church providing the meeting space, another church providing a worship team, and another church providing a message. In a church building that holds around 175 people, the entire auditorium was packed and extra chairs supplied to meet the seating needs.

Another inter-congregational worship event was held in the spring of 2017 on another Sunday evening. This one took place at an old church building in downtown Claremont, which holds in excess of 200 people. This particular event centered more on music, with each church providing a special musical piece from some of its members along with two people leading worship songs throughout the evening. One pastor shared a testimony and presented the gospel toward the end. Finally, the various church's leaders were asked to come forward to pray. The church building was again filled, showing much enthusiasm for this activity among church members.

All of the previous activity took place in Claremont, but more recently the Connect Center has sought to bring its networking activity into neighboring towns, including Newport, NH and Springfield, VT. In both towns, worship events were hosted in May of 2018. Since these areas did not have a strong church network in place yet, the Connect Center director built a worship team (some coming from Newport, NH) to provide music for the events. He also visited and planned with

various pastors from these locations to secure space and to ensure participation. The Springfield event took place on a Saturday night and was attended by around 50 people. Though not a large crowd, it was a good first step in bringing like-minded churches together for mission.

The Newport, NH event was built on a slightly more solidified network of churches, and it was very well attended. Using the same worship team as the Springfield event but adding the element of a dramatic presentation by the pastor of one Newport church and special music by Claremont Christian Academy students, this event was very well attended. There were three churches represented from Newport and also some attendance from church members in Claremont. There were approximately 125-150 people in attendance on a Sunday evening, a great success for this first foray into networked activity in Newport.

Incorporating Contextualization

Even if the church is highly engaged in mission and has systems in place for making disciples, there is still the issue of the disconnect between church and culture. Some churches have dealt with this by providing a Sunday morning experience that seeks to relate to an unchurched target audience. While this has proven successful to some degree, it is still the case that these churches are often reaching people who are de-churched or frustrated with their current church experience, while not necessarily tapping into the “blue ocean” of those who have never had any connection to church in their family or their past (cf. Hirsch). This large demographic is becoming larger as the culture trends toward secularization, leading many people to have no interest in church or questioning the importance of sitting in a building on a Sunday.

The question then becomes how to engage the type of people who do not have church anywhere on their radar and may be very apprehensive about or even opposed to attending. The key,

of course, it to build relationships with them. However, much of the church's activity can inadvertently drive a wedge between the church community and the completely unchurched because it tends to build an insulated subculture that no longer meaningfully relates to the culture at large. Although many churches would gladly welcome any visitor, even a person who looks, acts, and believes nothing like the people in the church, the reality is that the subculture of the church world often makes it hard for church members to have time and to feel comfortable spending large amounts of time with the unchurched.

Therefore, the Connect Center has sought very hard to be highly engaged in building rapport and relationships within the secular sphere and to help people within churches to do the same. The following material will highlight some ways in which the Connect Center has done this.

Building Rapport with Community Leaders and Organizations

One strategy to engaging with a secular community is to build a rapport with government officials. We have had a very good relationship with the planning office in Claremont. The Connect Center director even served for a year on the City Center Steering Committee. He has also recently met with the new business development coordinator and given her a tour of the REMIX, Shining Success, and Connect Center facilities. It was mentioned earlier that the city manager attended the Connect Center grand opening, and though he has since retired, one of our assistants has built a good rapport with the new city manager. In spring of 2017, REMIX hosted a City Council forum where people could come and interact with the new city manager and city council members. This typifies the approach we have taken to building rapport among community leaders, and they have been very favorable toward our efforts to impact the city, even though they do not all share our faith commitments.

Aside from getting to know leaders, we have also participated in community building groups, such as Community Partners and Healthy, Vibrant Claremont. Community Partners is a monthly meeting of various community service organizations that seeks to build communication and partnerships. Healthy Vibrant Claremont was started by influential community members and personnel from Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center for the purpose of developing strategies to improve Claremont's overall health and image. By participating in these gatherings, the Connect Center has shown itself to be interested and part of the community building efforts, even if other individuals and organizations do not share the same worldview and approach.

We have also built strong connections with particular secular community building organizations, such as TLC, Baby Steps, and The Haven. All of these organizations overlap with the Connect Center's desire to be of assistance to people in the community. These organizations have referred people to the services we offer, and we have done the same for them. Sometimes a person is referred to us from an organization, and we are able to connect them with a church leader or ministry that may be of help to them. We have also allowed one of these organizations to run one of their programs out of our space. It was a sixteen-session course called "Getting Ahead" that helps people who live in poverty understand a middle class mindset and how to function with a forward-thinking outlook.

Although, the Connect Center interacts positively and cooperatively with secular leaders and organizations, it never hides the fact that it operates as a church networking and activity organization, and it never compromises its core value that the gospel is the ultimate answer to the condition of humanity.

Walk-in Accessibility

One other strategy the Connect Center has employed to make church efforts and systems more accessible to the community is by providing walk-in hours, a phone number to call, and an integrated e-mail system. This allows people to easily contact the Connect Center with any need or question that they have and get them in contact with churches and programs that may be of assistance. For example, if an economically disadvantaged individual needs a bed for their new apartment, they may contact the Connect Center, which in turn sends out an email to all of the church offices. The church offices pass this information along to church members (at their discretion), along with the contact information of the individual in need. This efficiently connects community members outside of churches with resources that church members possess and allows Christians to share the love of Christ by meeting needs. This provides a beautiful backdrop for sharing the gospel with these individuals, who may have never considered stepping foot inside of a church.

Increasing Multiplication

The preceding activity of incubating missional activity, networking churches, and contextualizing the work in the community is merely the groundwork for the main goal of the church, which is to make disciples of Jesus. The Connect Center seeks to aid the church in this endeavor. It does not initiate or run discipleship programs but rather seeks to enhance and magnify the disciple-making activity of the church. This is to make sure the church takes full responsibility for its job and works on large scale (as many churches) rather than outsourcing its efforts to evangelize to one parachurch organization.

Providing Church Program Space and Promotion

One example of where the Connect Center has enhanced the church's effort is in providing space and promotion for a Celebrate Recovery program. As discussed in chapter one, the Claremont area has a major drug issue, and certain churches are engaging with culture by reaching out with recovery efforts that provide a support system but also focus on the reality and power of the gospel to bring change. REMIX provides the main meeting area and the Connect Center provides extra small group space for a Celebrate Recovery program run by Riverbank Church, which started out of White River Junction Vermont but has opened a campus in Claremont, NH. Since this church does not possess permanent space in Claremont, Remix and the Connect Center provide facility space at no cost to the church in a highly visible and accessible location for those who do not have transportation. This has enhanced the church's discipleship-making effort by making it affordable to run this program and by allowing it to run in business-type locations that people feel comfortable coming to even if they are not church attenders.

Providing Training and Coaching

The Connect Center not only provides space, but it can also provide coaching and assistance with church members who wish to engage in disciple-making endeavors. This was the case with one church member who had the vision for a program called "Relational Medicine." The Connect Center director met with this individual multiple times to give feedback on the ideas and to encourage her to pursue what God had placed on her heart. The result was to provide group meeting times at the Connect Center a few days a week. Certain groups focus directly on Christian teaching, others on more general issues. There is also a time for people to bring lunch and have more casual interaction and discussion with others. Because the person who started this has a background in

veterinary medicine and has also been through serious personal obstacles, she is able to share her story and help others cope with a wide range of traumatic situations. She has been involved in church for years but has previously not had the permission or a viable venue in which to pursue her disciple-making ideas.

These two examples of enhancing disciple-making efforts are simply the beginning of all that can be done if church members are given encouragement and resources for their God-given calling. Since the Connect Center is meant to be an incubator for missional activity, there will potentially be many more ideas and efforts that are birthed and resourced. The ministry of Tampa Underground provides a snapshot of what this can look like, as they have helped start over two hundred “micro-churches” that exist to make disciples in the Tampa area. The key at this stage is to take the missional impulse and outreach efforts and to ensure that disciple-making components are built into them. It is not enough to gather people together and build good friendships (although this is important), there must also be intentional effort to share the gospel and to form worshipping communities. The Connect Center will continue to work toward this end as it coaches individuals and provides resources for church outreach.

Conclusion

The Connect Center is funded through missions giving from church(es) and donations from individuals. The Director of the Connect Center is able to raise personal support as a missionary under the MissionQuest organization. Ideally, the Connect Center will continue to increase in donor giving and be able to pay for staff workers who can help aid in providing walk-in assistance, promotional services for the Connect Center and other networked ministries, and participation in

networking activity, such as emailing churches, interacting with pastors and community organization leaders.

While there has been much accomplished over the time the Connect Center has functioned, much is still in the incubation phase in terms of the overarching goals of making disciples of Jesus and having a marked spiritual impact in the upper New England region. The Connect Center and other creative missional ministries must work on creating environments that are conducive for bringing people into a vital relationship with Christ as well as increasing the effectiveness of funneling individuals into existing local church discipleship opportunities.

A few different outcomes are possible and are already being observed to some degree. As the Connect Center and other networked missional ministries touch the lives of people in the community, some of these individuals will be integrated into existing churches. Sometimes, for example, someone has asked a secular community organization for a place to find spiritual guidance, and the Connect Center has been contacted and able to help that person find a church to become part of. Another outcome is that the networked missional ministries are helping the church in its endeavor to reach out by being an example and inspiration to people in the church. When people see others who are following God's lead in using their unique gifts and passions to reach out to the lost, those in the church are reminded of the importance the church has in ministering the gospel and are able to see how they might be able to impact the world as well. Finally, there is the outcome of encouraging churches that are already being faithful but can easily become discouraged in a context where Christianity is often not appreciated and even opposed. It is a breath of fresh air to see that others are engaging in the endeavor to impact and reach the lost and are utilizing unique and creative ways to do so. Seeing partners in kingdom mission become laborers in the same field can truly invigorate those who have been laboring for a considerable period of time. They are

encouraged that they are not alone, and their efforts have been fruitful in laying the groundwork and maintaining the gospel mission to which God has called His people.

The next chapter will show the progress and assess the effectiveness of the Connect Center and related networked ministries in Claremont in the areas of mission, cooperation, contextualization, and multiplication and how far along things are set up to achieve the ultimate disciple-making, church-planting goals.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES OF NETWORKING CREATIVE MISSIONAL MINISTRIES

Introduction

In this project, the overarching themes in relation to starting new missional ministries in upper New England are mission, cooperation, contextualization, multiplication. This chapter will examine and assess the effectiveness of the Connect Center and related missional ministries in each of these areas. Specifically, it will look at feedback and data related to the work in relation to the four missional response strategies outlined in this project, including whether these ministries have helped the church to be on mission, if networking and cooperation has taken place in unique ways and is helping the church missionally, if these ministries are bringing the gospel in contextualized, meaningful, and impactful ways to the cultural context, and whether disciple-making is being enhanced as a result of the collective effort of these endeavors. The final section of this chapter will discuss whether it is missionally advantageous to continue birthing new creative missional ministries like the ones exemplified in this project and how they can be optimized for making disciples and impacting the upper New England culture.

Mission Outcomes

How the Connect Center has Facilitated Mission

Relationship will be seen to be a key to the collective endeavors talked about in this project. The Scripture places much emphasis on how those within the church relate to each other, and though this is often recognized as needed within a local congregation, it is easily missed that this applies to relationships among members of varying churches. Disregarding the great

importance of these relationships has weakened the strategic partnership, witness, and impact of the church.

The Connect Center, in a fundamental sense, is a place of relationship building. Specifically, it is designed to build and enhance inter-church (local church) relationships as well as relationships with leaders and general members of the community. It has been extremely encouraging to witness relationships made and/or strengthened through the Connect Center's existence. This has happened in the pastoral prayer times and inter-church worship settings.

Churches Are Aligning for Mission that Might Not Otherwise Cooperate

A great obstacle to the biblical relationships that this project is advocating is suspicion from historical and theological realities as well as past wrongs and offenses. The philosophy of ministry adapted in this project has been that discussion among those of differing perspectives should supersede and supplant distrust. In other words, a key to relationship-building is to actually spend time with those who are from a different perspective in order to better mutually understand one another. This is the principle of speaking the truth in love so that all are made more mature in the teaching of the Christian faith. Sadly, many churches never cooperate because leaders are not in the habit of gathering for discussion and prayer. Just by simply having pastor/church leader meetings for meal and prayer, relationships have been developed across denominational lines, which lays the groundwork for partnering for mission. The evidence of the unity churches are experiencing has been expressed in church members from various congregations gathering for worship (as detailed in the previous chapter).

Regarding the reality of past offenses, which is another thwarter of relationships, the biblical answer is communication and reconciliation (Matt. 18). Meeting together as church

leaders also helps with this issue, whether the offense has occurred between leaders of different churches or members within churches. One touching example of the effectiveness of gathering for a meal and praying was to see two church leaders that had had past division and hurt reconcile and hug one another, It was a tangible expression of forgiveness and reconciliation in a situation that had perpetuated church division for several years. Again, churches coming together for worship also helped paved the way to the moment of reconciliation.

Bringing healing to damaged relationships is an ever-present need because of the fallen condition of humans. This is why the Scripture states that we must be “forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave [us].” (Eph. 4:32). There are still relationships that need to be mended (and even new rifts that have arisen since the birth of the Connect Center). Therefore, this ministry must continue to help leaders to gather and pray for the unity of God’s people.

As the Connect Center continues to seek a fulfillment of the biblical vision of church relationships, it has been exciting to see new ministries birthed for mission since of the founding of the Connect Center. Though these ministries were not started directly because of the Connect Center, they have been embraced more universally by the church at large and viewed more as a benefit than a threat to existing ministries. These new ministries have also been enhanced and made more effective because of the cooperative attitude being fostered (as will be shown below). The next section will outline new missional ministries that have arisen over the last several years in Claremont and how they are fulfilling mission in the community.

How New Missional Ministries Are Impacting the Area

The following is a list of new ministries in Claremont and a synopsis of their mission orientation. The first two ministries are innovative missional ministries, and the second two are local church campuses

1. Shining Success

Shana, the founder of Shining Success (ministry detailed in previous chapter) was a woman who had worked in skin care and spa settings and wanted to use her skill set for missional purposes. She started the program in a junkyard office space in 2011, then moved to a church from 2013–2017. It was in 2017 that she was able to move to a more accessible location in downtown Claremont due to a partnership with the Connect Center involving shared use of storefront space. This new location has made it easier for clients to come to where she operates, has helped donors to feel comfortable sharing with potential clients, and has increased visibility and press coverage. Her work was highlighted in a television news segment of NH Chronicle on a network station. She has also been able to connect and be involved in the chamber of commerce as a result of being in this space. This visibility and accessibility has allowed her to effectively continue and grow her program to serve both women and men and have a consistent presence and outreach into Claremont. Though clients are primarily given the physical benefit of consultation and professional clothing, this ministry allows Shana to share Christ's love, talk about her connection with church, and has presented a positive image of church in people's minds.

2. REMIX

Jimmie, the founder of REMIX, was constantly hearing young adults in the church (churches of smaller sizes), "Where do we meet people that is not a place with alcohol?" As a

former professional DJ, he found the clubs are the only place to go to meet people. REMIX has become a positive alternative to the bar setting. While it is overseen by a local church, it operates as its own organization and place for people to meet, socialize, and come to periodic events. It was in a meeting with the director of the Connect Center that Jimmie discovered the perfect place to carry out his vision. He believes that ministry must be where the people are, and thus his endeavor is “putting Jesus in the marketplace” and “putting Christ in the center of the community.” The missional benefit of creating this atmosphere is that the REMIX staff is encountering people that would not likely be in church, and they have the opportunity to interact and be a witness to those who show up. The witness of the church has also been enhanced by the publicity this ministry has received in local newspapers, the WNTK radio station, the Union Leader newspaper in Manchester, NH and even The Boston Globe. Governor Sununu and Senator Hassan have also given attention to REMIX. Publicity itself is not what is important but the fact that this is an overtly Christian ministry that promotes the gospel being highlighted in clearly non-Christian circles. It is giving the gospel a platform and hearing in a powerful way.

3. Riverbank Church Claremont

Riverbank Church (part of the Association of Related Churches) was founded in 2010 in Lebanon, NH. Eventually the church moved just over the Connecticut River to White River Junction, VT around 2014 and then completed a building project for its new worship center in 2016. The church has over 500 in attendance with three services. In spring of 2018, the church started a satellite campus in Claremont, NH, which meets at the local movie theater and presently runs 135 people in attendance. This church’s ministry philosophy is evangelistically based, and the services are geared toward reaching visitors. They utilize a contemporary form of music and preaching style. This church reached out to the Connect Center when first planning the launch of

their new campus to discuss possible places to host their worship experiences. The director of the Connect Center showed and discussed a few possible spaces for them to meet, including a meeting hall in the downtown area and Claremont Opera House. Now that the campus has opened in Claremont, they are hosting a weekly Sunday service at 9:00am with approximately 200 in attendance each Sunday.

4. Lake Church Claremont

Lake Sunapee Baptist Church (or Lake Church) is part of the Southern Baptist Convention of churches and started in the Lake Sunapee/Newport, NH area (20 minutes east of Claremont). They have been growing consistently since 2010, when their most recent pastor Sam Coberley came to serve there. They have since acquired a larger building in Newport and have two services each Sunday with around 200 in attendance. They are a very evangelistically oriented church, like Riverbank but with a slightly less contemporary feel, and have been very successful in reaching those lower on the economic scale. In 2018, they purchased an old church building in Claremont at auction for \$700 (not a typo) and worked on getting it up to code for about a year. In August of 2019, they opened this location and moved their Wednesday night worship time to this building to begin outreach in Claremont. The director of the Connect Center has a close relationship with this pastor, has attended some of the worship times in Claremont and has led music there on one occasion. This church has had a successful outreach to the high school in Newport, providing food in the mornings at their “Activate Center.” In Claremont, they plan to have a similar outreach to the high school since their new building is not far from the school.

Cooperation Outcomes

Recently at a church in the area, a pastor said during the service that the unity of churches has had a great spiritual impact on this region which accounts for the effectiveness of the church. The Connect Center's name is meant to evoke the value and mission of churches connecting in relational and missional unity. It is the vision given by the Lord for His people in Scripture, and the challenge is to carry it out in a period of church history where there is much splintering and even opposition among varying Christian groups. It is also a time of opportunity as the church is in the midst of a culture that has largely abandoned Christian values and worldview perspectives. This leaves the church (with all of its internal differences) with a shared stance in relation to a world that does not understand, care about, or accept the message of the gospel.

The belief behind this project is that the church contains resources in the form of gifted people but that those resources are latent because of the isolation and lack of cooperation among churches, particularly in a region such as upper New England. There are many churches, but they are small and often do not acknowledge one another in practical endeavors (especially in more rural areas). However, if these churches were to share resources, their impact would be magnified as the collective gifting of God's people were utilized for mission.

It is exciting to see this dynamic play out in Claremont, especially through the efforts of the ministries outlined in this project. The following information will detail how cooperation has been fostered and led to greater resourcing and impact in the Connect Center, Shining Success, and REMIX ministries.

Connect Center

A particularly wonderful aspect of how the Connect Center has operated is that it is not just one church that is able to use the space as an outreach in downtown Claremont. It has been a place where various churches and church members have been able to utilize the facility from their own gifting and resources. Therefore, it is not just one church's outreach but a collective place of outreach. Grace River has used the space for an Alpha Course, and they will soon be using the space for area schoolteachers to have a time of monthly prayer. Calvary Baptist Church has hosted a grief support group and soon will be forming an anxiety support group. Riverbank Church has used the Connect Center (along with adjacent REMIX) for Celebrate Recovery.

Shining Success

Shining Success has benefited greatly from cooperation because they could not afford to be in the space they are in. However, the Connect Center has provided the front of the store area for their ministry, which is perfect for displaying outfits in the large windows that face the street and downtown circle. The space (previously a tuxedo/bridal shop) also has vast closet space for clothing and changing rooms. Shining Success has access to all of this and pays for only a portion of the rent (what they can afford).

Not only can this organization be in the space because of a cooperative effort, but they are also able to cross-promote for the area churches at the Connect Center. The Connect Center has an information area at the front with business cards, flyers, and brochures about different ministries and organizations. When a client utilizes Shining Success, this program is then able to point them to other church resources that may be interesting and benefit them. Cooperation

allows one person from Shining Success to be a voice and representative for many other churches.

REMIX

Cooperation is what led REMIX to be in the space they are in. It is next to the Connect Center (same building, different suite), and thus the two spaces can be utilized together, as was the case with Celebrate Recovery having the large meeting at REMIX and then conducting small groups in both spaces. If someone needs a quiet place for counsel during REMIX hours, the Connect Center is conveniently available for a place to sit and talk, away from music and a crowd. Cooperation has also financially helped both REMIX and the Connect Center. The building owner gave a lower rental rate since our organizations came in together to occupy two empty suites. Also, the internet service is able to accommodate both spaces and the bill is able to be divided between both ministries. Therefore, cooperation saves on costs and allows our resources to go further.

Contextualization Outcomes

Being in the heart of the downtown area has helped tremendously with the contextualization of ministry. It is so easy for church ministry to become detached from the surrounding community, and even if it could be a benefit to people outside of the church, many are unaware of what is available or feel that church buildings are exclusively for people who belong to those churches. Here are some ways the downtown missional ministries have helped to contextualize ministry and facilitate bringing the presence of the church into the community.

Walk-ins Have Been Helped

The Connect Center, Shining Success, and REMIX all have open hours when people are able to walk in and be accommodated. The Connect Center has a form for individuals to fill out to identify various needs and issues that need to be addressed. These walk-ins are offered counsel and, at times, prayer for their situations. They sometimes are simply pointed to another organization that has the resources for which they are looking. Other times an email has been sent to church offices to inquire about people within area churches are able to meet a specific need. Of course, when a good opportunity opens, the gospel can be shared with those receiving assistance and an invitation to a church can be given. Shining Success and REMIX each have their own ways of meeting people where they are, and because they are in these business locations, it is easy for people to be aware and know that they can freely come in during open hours.

Partnerships with other Organizations Have Developed

A very positive outcome of the efforts of the downtown ministries is the excellent partnerships that have developed with various community organizations. While churches could develop a relationship with these same entities, the nature of the downtown ministries has made these partnerships a more natural fit. For example, it has been easy for a local organization like Tender Loving Connections (which is a secular support to individuals with personal financial and family needs) to be in touch with the Connect Center via phone and email about clients who may benefit from services and people from within churches. People at secular organizations like this do not have to call any specific church or feel that they are endorsing religion per se by reaching out to the Connect Center, and yet they are offering their clients something that is needed and is a fitting resource for them. In some cases, clients coming to secular organizations are actually looking for

spiritual guidance or a church to attend, and the Connect Center is readily available to assist with this need. Another example of a secular organization partnering with the Connect Center has been The Haven in White River Junction, VT using the Connect Center space for a course called Bridges Out of Poverty.

REMIX has developed partnerships with organizations that are focused on recovery efforts, including the Center for Recovery Resources in Claremont. REMIX personnel have even visited the local correctional facility to talk with inmates about transitioning their life after they have served their time in prison. Shining Success also has fantastic relationships with local organizations because it is another practical service being offered to individuals in the same demographic.

The City Takes Note and is Encouraged

Because of the ability for these ministries to help people by being accessible and being in good partnership with community organizations, the city leadership is encouraged and is very supportive of their existence and operation downtown. Some of the feedback received is that the existence of these ministries helps bring vitality and business to the downtown area. Sadly, this part of Claremont has been in serious economic decline for some time, and many businesses struggle to exist in this area. Filling up storefronts with organizations that are not fully dependent on selling merchandise is a complement to the existing businesses. Also, REMIX is able to set up seating outside during summer hours, which adds to a welcoming and lively feel for this area of the city.

Multiplication Outcomes

Mission, cooperation, and contextualization are all vital components to the strategy outlined in this project. However, they are in reality a set up for the ultimate purpose of making disciples. Engaging in all of these activities without making disciples is like playing a sport without the goal

of winning or constructing a building but not using it. The whole point of engaging in these activities must be with the goal of making disciples since that is ultimately what Jesus commanded His people to do. This section shows how the missional ministries in this project have aided toward the goal of making disciples thus far.

Primarily Disciple-making Happens in Local Churches

It is important to note that evangelism (sharing the gospel) can take place in a group setting, but it often comes down to one person sharing the message of Christ and demonstrating the powerful change that He makes. Disciple-making is tied directly to evangelism because Jesus' command was to make followers by sharing the gospel. The gospel is the entry way into a relationship with Christ as Lord and Savior, and the gospel is the foundation for living a life of following Jesus. Ministries like the ones presented in this project do not do the full job of making disciples. They create the platform and opportunities for the church (that is, individual believers) to meet people, demonstrate the love of Christ, and share the gospel. Through the interactions that are accommodated through missional ministries, the door is opened up to having an authentic interaction with those who are unchurched or de-churched. This is vitally important in a time and place where many people are unfamiliar with church and often have misperceptions about Christians and Christianity. The only way to penetrate the boundary between church and post-Christian society is for the church to boldly enter the arena of the surrounding culture. As these ministries have led the way in this initiative, individuals have had the opportunity to get to know Christians and be invited to church. It is, of course, in the local church context where the disciple-making process is ultimately fulfilled. This is one reason why certain new churches are mentioned

in this project because they, along with previously existing churches, will play a key role in making disciples.

Getting More People into Church and Starting New Churches

It will be important going into the future, then, to continue a focus on the local church itself. This will involve seeking to improve effectiveness in sharing the gospel and helping people become part of a church, churches doing the best possible job of creating an atmosphere and process conducive to disciple-making, and starting new churches that are best suited to accommodate the type of people that are being impacted by the gospel.

One of the best examples of the way this can work is in the efforts of Tampa Underground, detailed in the previous chapter. They integrate the concept of creative missional ministry with a robust understanding of the power of local church disciple-making. While some might criticize their ecclesiological approach itself, this ministry has proven the ability to effectively touch the lives of those outside the church, keep local church members actively engaged and equipped for mission, make a visible impact in the surrounding community, and (here is where the most important factor comes in), ultimately bring more people to believe and follow Christ in discipleship.

The following “Diagnostic for Mission” from Tampa Underground’s ministry exemplifies how they integrate the creative aspect of creating contextualized micro-churches while maintaining a clear focus on mission/disciple-making.

Diagnostic for Mission by Jeremy Stephens (revised by Timothy Frisch)¹

Each core member scores themselves based on these questions. The elder can help walk the group through identifying strengths of the micro church and weak spots...provide both **affirmation** and **next steps as a community and individuals**.

Score each core member then average those scores for the micro church's total.

Invites others from our mission field to micro church

1 (what mission?) 2 3 4 5 (like Jesus)

Regularly **prays** for our mission field

1 (what mission?) 2 3 4 5 (like Jesus)

Consistently has discussions and ideas **relevant** to our mission

1 (what mission?) 2 3 4 5 (like Jesus)

Makes **adjustments/changes** to the program to fit our mission field's needs

1 (what mission?) 2 3 4 5 (like Jesus)

Empowers other members to engage in our mission

1 (what mission?) 2 3 4 5 (like Jesus)

Makes **plans** for outreach with our mission field specifically in mind

1 (what mission?) 2 3 4 5 (like Jesus)

Average Score for

Community

Invite _____

Prayer _____

Relevancy _____

Adjust _____

Empower _____

Plans _____

1. Diagnostic tool available at: <https://www.tampaunderground.com/resource-blog/diagnostic-for-mission-essentials>

The Mission Essentials

Use the 6 Essentials to process where your micro church needs to take their next steps.

Prayer- how are we creating places of worship, prayer & the Word? Are there passages that really speak to and guide our mission specifically?

Vision- what is the vision for the mission and how do we communicate it consistently to the community?

Gathering- how are we gathering, forming community and investing in others in structured and unstructured times?

Outreach- how are we moving beyond the core to engage others with the gospel?

Leadership- how are the core members identifying/investing in potential leaders? How are we planning expansion: to grow, split and increase?

Catalytic Event- how are we using conferences, events to move group to next phase? What resources and help does the micro church need to launch next semester?



Stir Missional Life

Use this series of questions to guide your micro church through assessing and developing their outreach to a specific mission field.

Figure 6. Diagnostic for Mission from Tampa Underground¹

Landscape Today vs. Before

With all that has been said, there is cause both for joy and concern moving forward. The landscape of the Claremont area today is certainly different than even a few years ago, and the church has arguably made some real gains. The following points will seek to paint a picture for how the setting of this project today compares with five years previously when the initiative began. There are some very encouraging signs but there are also still very great challenges. Therefore, after outlining the signs of progress, the concluding section will create a potential roadmap for what could be done in the future to maintain and enhance all of the missional strategies specified in this project.

There Are More Evangelical Churches

One sign of movement in the right direction spiritually is an increase in local churches and Christian ministry. It is true that various churches have ceased to exist over the last few years, but most of this can be attributed to older denominational decline. The new churches and missional ministries being started as well as existing healthy churches would generally be described as evangelical (with some exception). This is fascinating considering the culture at large has become more secular but the new and stronger churches are more theologically conservative and are starker in their understanding of the gospel in relation to the surrounding culture. Below is a comparison of the ministry landscape from 2014 to the landscape today.

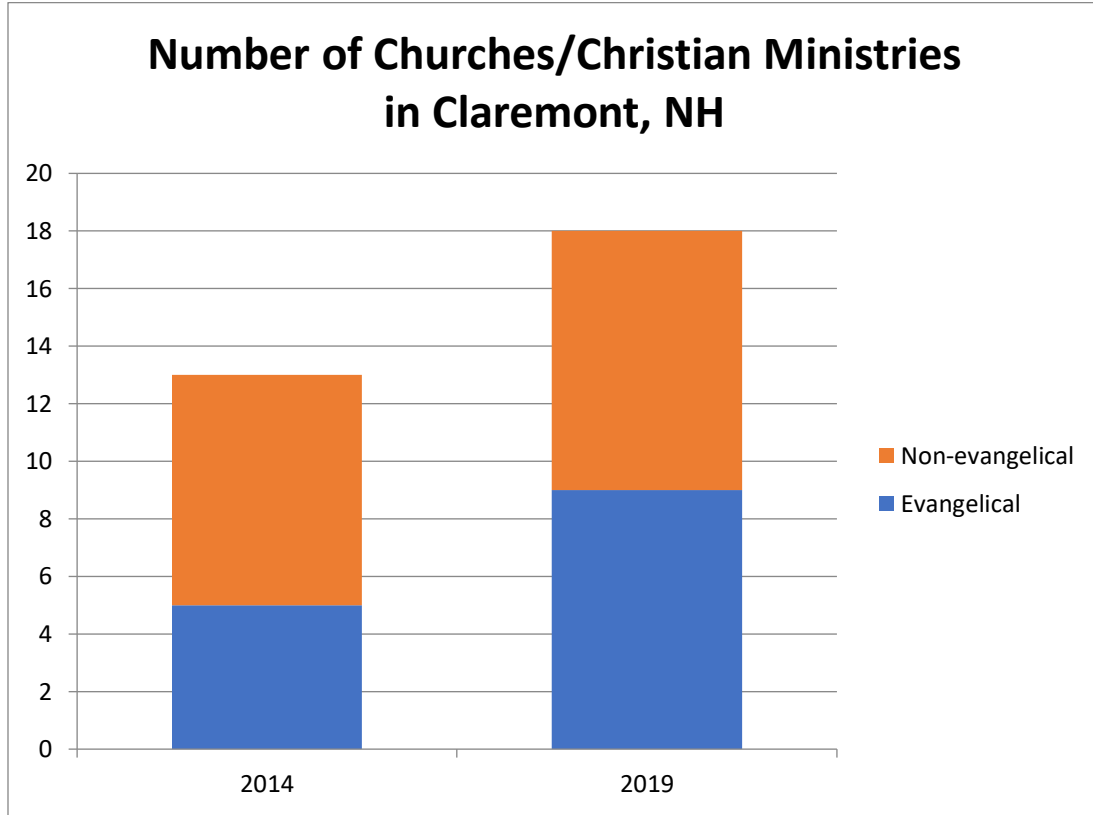


Figure 7. Number of Churches and Christian Ministries in Claremont, NH

In looking at the attendance in 2014 compared to today,² it is observed that the amount of people attending evangelical ministry has risen slightly while the amount of people attending non-evangelical ministry has declined slightly. Again, this shows an overall pattern of a sustained and even growing evangelical presence in a larger context where much of Christian influence is in steady decline.

2. Note: This is estimated data based on general knowledge of these churches and ministries, visiting some of them, and receiving attendance records from some of them. These estimates were compiled and divided into the categories defined as evangelical and non-evangelical, based on each ministry's overall doctrinal viewpoint.

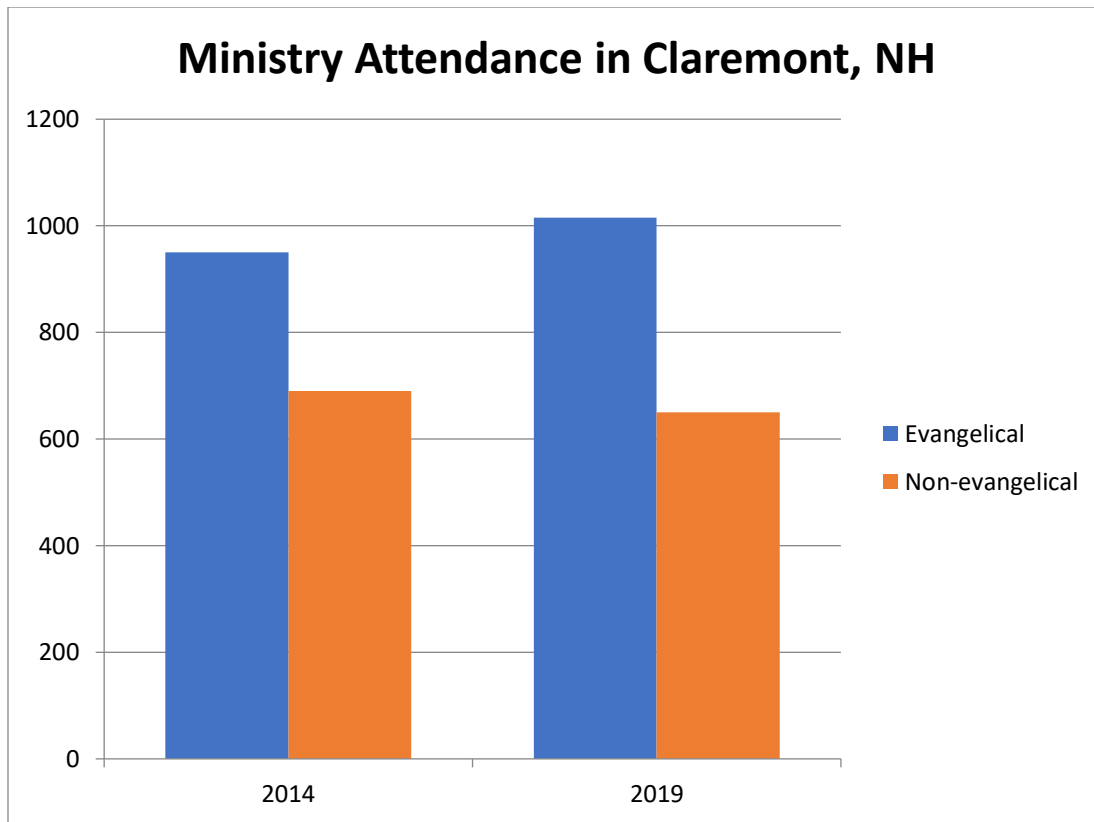


Figure 8. Ministry Attendance in Claremont, NH (2014 vs. 2019)

The Churches Have a Sense of Cooperation

Another sign of good movement is increased cooperation. While it will always be a challenge to maintain unity and a cooperative attitude, many have commented that the unity they have experienced among churches in this region is unlike anything they have witnessed in other places. This is encouraging since it reveals a fulfillment of Christ's plan and will for His church and also shows success in the endeavor to facilitate this attitude.

People Are Coming into Churches

It is very important that even as the church landscape shifts to note whether new people from unchurched backgrounds are being integrated into a church setting. Simply having people move from one church to another is not a sufficient goal. There is plenty of work to do in getting people who are in a culture that does not understand the significance of church or are even predisposed against it to come into a church setting. The overall efforts of ministries like the ones in this project and the churches that are serious about interacting with the mindset of this generation are having an impact. There are certainly new people coming into church settings. However, there must be continued efforts and strategies to capitalize on this trend and to work against the spiritual inertia in the other direction.

The preceding activity of incubating missional activity, networking churches, and contextualizing the work in the community is merely the groundwork for the main goal of the church, which is to make disciples of Jesus.

Where to Go from Here

In looking at the overall landscape, there are good spiritual signs due to the focus on the four missional responses of this project. The area of greatest weakness and need is in disciple-making. This is certainly the case with the downtown ministries but also is relevant to churches. Even as people are brought in through the door, it is vital for churches to be as effective as possible by having a disciple-making process that will work well with the type of individuals coming into this setting.

Below is a suggested approach for where to go from here. It will paint a picture of possibilities for how to capitalize on the movement already seen and improve in the area of disciple-making.

What Needs to be Done

1. Training Systems Need to be Developed

There are two types of training which could be offered at the Connect Center, which would aid in the development of more prolific and effective disciple-making. The first would be “vision training,” which would be focused on showing the examples and power of creating missional ministries. The second would be disciple-making training and resources. An example of these types of trainings and resourcing is seen in materials provided by Tampa Underground.³ Aside from these trainings, there could also be times of coaching and collaboration for ministry leaders and participants to discuss how to steer existing groups toward disciple-making environments.

2. Fluid Organizational Systems Need to be Implemented

One of the most challenging aspects of working with movement dynamics is having enough freedom and flexibility to allow for greater adaptation and innovation but also having enough structure to provide for long-term health and stability for what is coming to fruition. Therefore, a simple structure might be developed over time based around a cooperative leadership model and a shared commitment to certain core values and beliefs. A written statement could be formed and adapted to articulate these values and beliefs and to form a basis of relationship among leaders. How formal and structured the leadership model would be depends on future developments.

3. E.g. resource worksheets found at <https://www.undergroundnetwork.org/resources>.

Nevertheless, groups of people always need a certain amount of organization for harmony and effectiveness in achieving goals.

3. Multiplying Ministries and Groups in More Remote Areas

Finally, as a basic leadership structure and vision training are established, having an eye toward birthing and multiplying contextualized ministries and disciple-making communities is vital to fulfilling the goal of bringing the gospel to bear in rural upper New England. Again, by using a networked approach, these ministries could be resourced and given greater viability even though they might be in more remote areas that cannot sustain a particular ministry without outside assistance and funding.

Conclusions

The outcomes of this project show reasons for encouragement and optimism for the church reaching out in a post-Christian, rural context like upper New England. The outcomes also show areas in need of attention and improvement. It will be vital to continue to work on the four missional strategies of mission, cooperation, contextualization, and multiplication. A great emphasis going forward, though, must be in the area of disciple-making strategies and systems, but it is encouraging to see the progress thus far. And in the area of disciple-making, new churches starting and growing marks a significant turn toward progress in the church's mission. Most of all, the church must persevere and remain faithful to a scriptural understanding of the gospel and church, and Lord willing, this perseverance will bring a lasting change in the spiritual landscape of upper New England. Already, things are moving in the right direction.

APPENDIX A

RELIGIOUS RANKINGS IN UPPER NEW ENGLAND STATES*

Maine

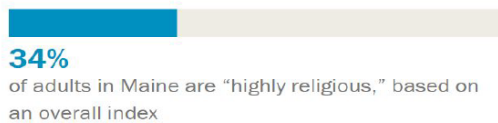


is tied for

48th

most religious state overall

(about this score)



Religious profile of Maine



Vermont

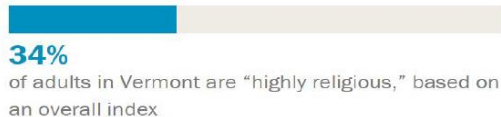


is tied for

48th

most religious state overall

(about this score)



Religious profile of Vermont



* Charts generated at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/>.

Massachusetts



is tied for

50th

most religious state overall

(about this score)

33%

of adults in Massachusetts are “highly religious,”
based on an overall index

Religious profile of Massachusetts

33% (49th)

say religion is very important in their lives

23% (48th)

say they attend worship services at least weekly

37% (48th)

say they pray daily

40% (51st)

say they believe in God with absolute certainty

New Hampshire



is tied for

50th

most religious state overall

(about this score)

33%

of adults in New Hampshire are “highly religious,”
based on an overall index

Religious profile of New Hampshire

33% (49th)

say religion is very important in their lives

22% (49th)

say they attend worship services at least weekly

36% (49th)

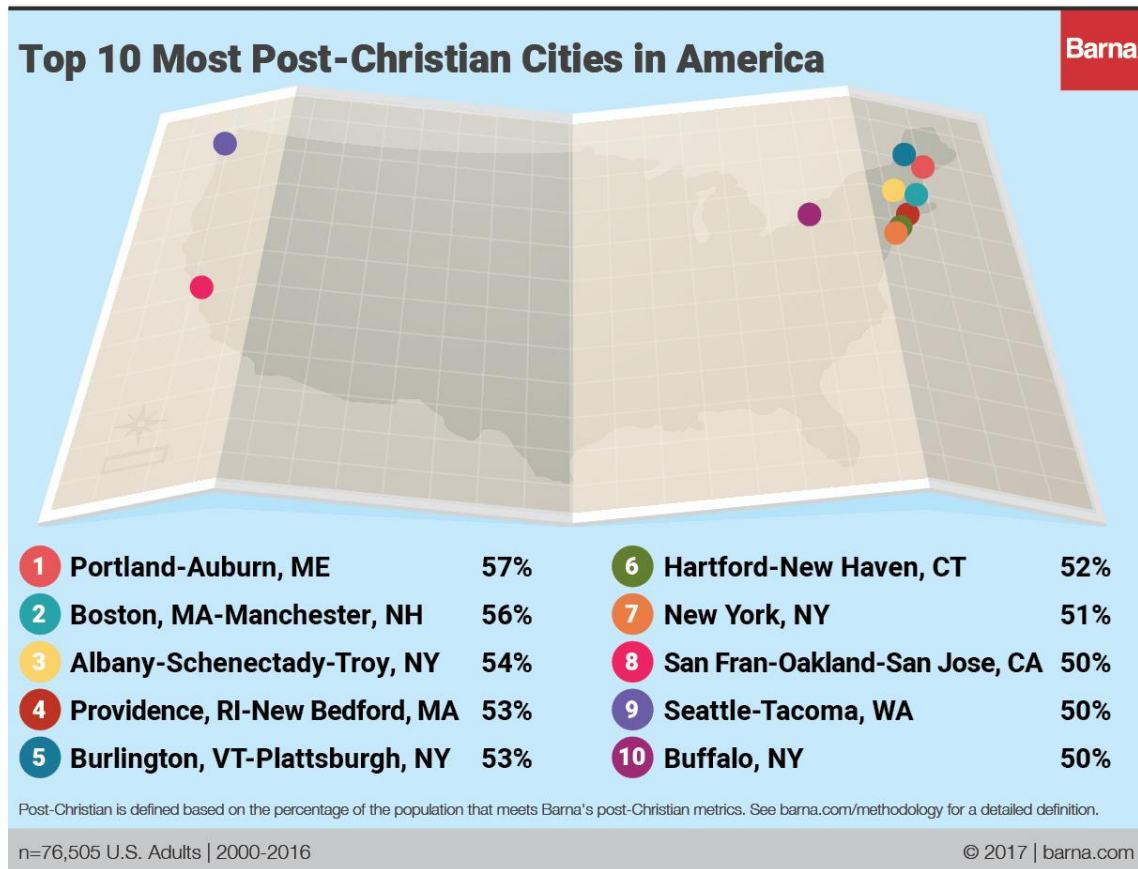
say they pray daily

43% (49th)

say they believe in God with absolute certainty

APPENDIX B

THE MOST POST-CHRISTIAN AREAS IN THE U. S.*

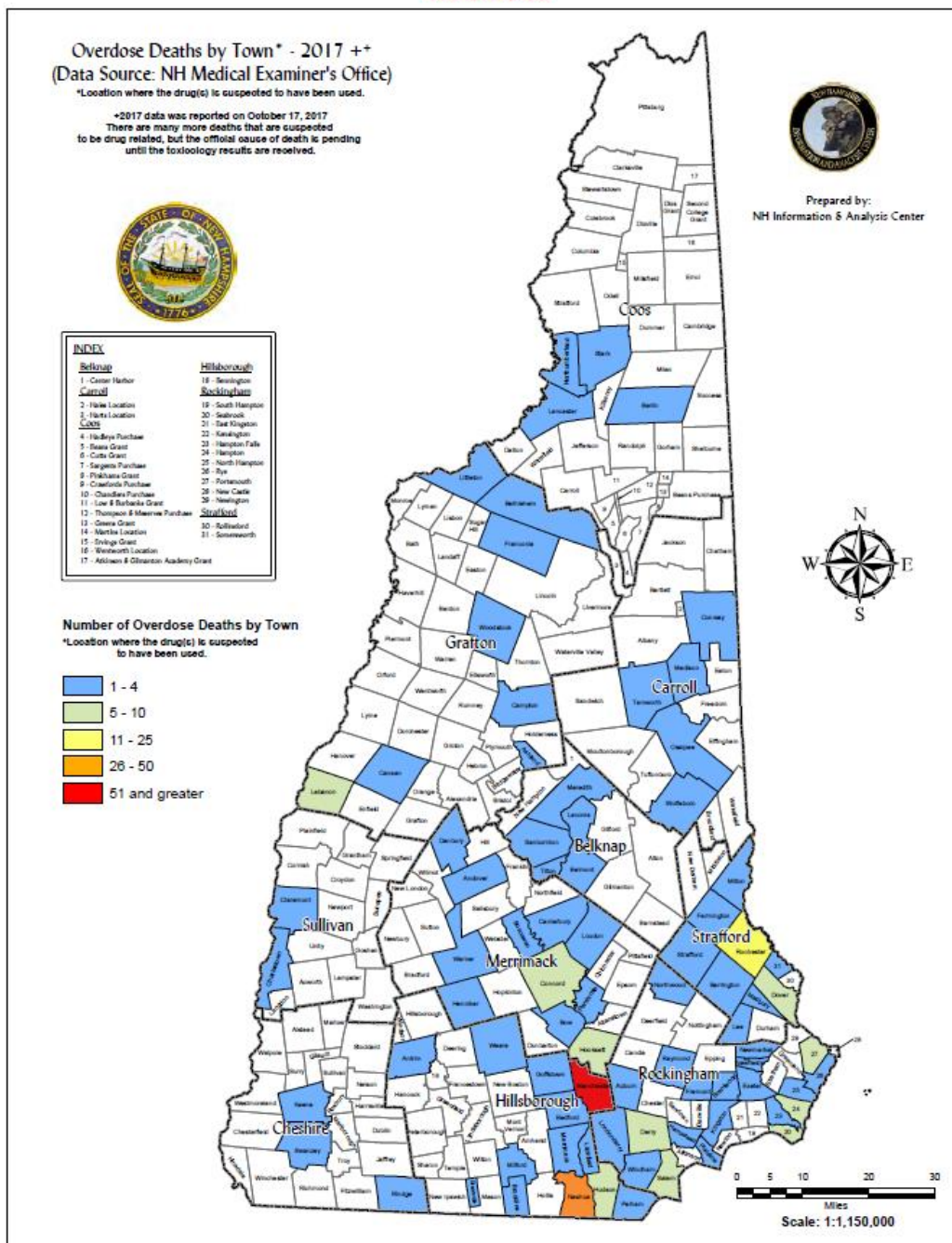


* This chart is posted at <https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-america-2017/>; accessed August 2017.

APPENDIX C

NEW HAMPSHIRE DRUG OVERDOSE STATISTICS*

UNCLASSIFIED



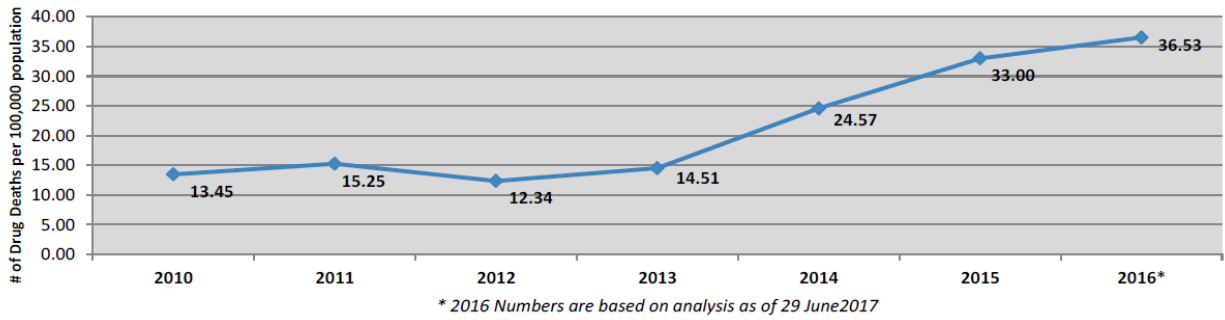
UNCLASSIFIED - AUTHORIZED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

5

* Information available at <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/data.htm>.

Drug Overdose Deaths By Year

Data Source: NH Medical Examiner's Office



APPENDIX D

CHURCH OPINIONS QUESTIONNAIRE AND CHURCH LEADER SURVEY

The following questionnaire can be accessed at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1fmBgXLU_xwL0EVc3gVOQU2ligN1_izNtF9X-wtdV1Vw/edit

Upper New England Opinions about Church

This questionnaire is designed to explore the opinions people have about church in upper New England. The information you provide will be helpful for churches and church leaders to better understand the perceptions of people in our area. This study is being conducted by Tim Frisch, director of the Connect Center and associate pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Claremont, NH. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name in any presentation or publication. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

1. Name

2. Age

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75 or over

3. Gender

Mark only one oval.

☐ Male

☐ Female

4. E-mail (required for Amazon giveaway link)

5. Phone Number

6. Where you live (town and state)

7. Church Attendance

Mark only one oval.

☐ I do not attend church regularly.

☐ I have been attending church regularly for sixth months or less

☐ Other:

8. I have had a lot of personal exposure to church.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

9. If any, which church denomination(s) have you attended?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Anglican
- ☐ Baptist
- ☐ Congregational
- ☐ Episcopal
- ☐ Lutheran
- ☐ Methodist
- ☐ Non-denominational
- ☐ Orthodox
- ☐ Presbyterian
- ☐ Roman Catholic

Other: ☐ _____

10. I have been to:

Check all that apply.

- ☐ A church worship service
- ☐ Sunday School
- ☐ A church youth group
- ☐ A church-sponsored event (such as VBS, church meal, Christmas program, etc.)

Other: ☐ _____

11. My overall experience with church was good.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

12. I think church is important for a my spiritual well-being.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

13. I think church is important for a my overall well-being.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

14. Most churches in our area seem to really care about the community.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

15. Generally, churches in our area are making a positive difference in our community.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

16. If so, in what ways?

17. Church people I have met have given me a positive impression of Christianity.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

18. I have strong personal beliefs about spiritual matters.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

19. I have areas of major disagreement with the church and Christian beliefs.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

20. If so, which ones?

21. I would consider going to church if a friend asked me to come.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

22. If not, for what reason(s)?

23. I would be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview about my own perceptions of church.

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

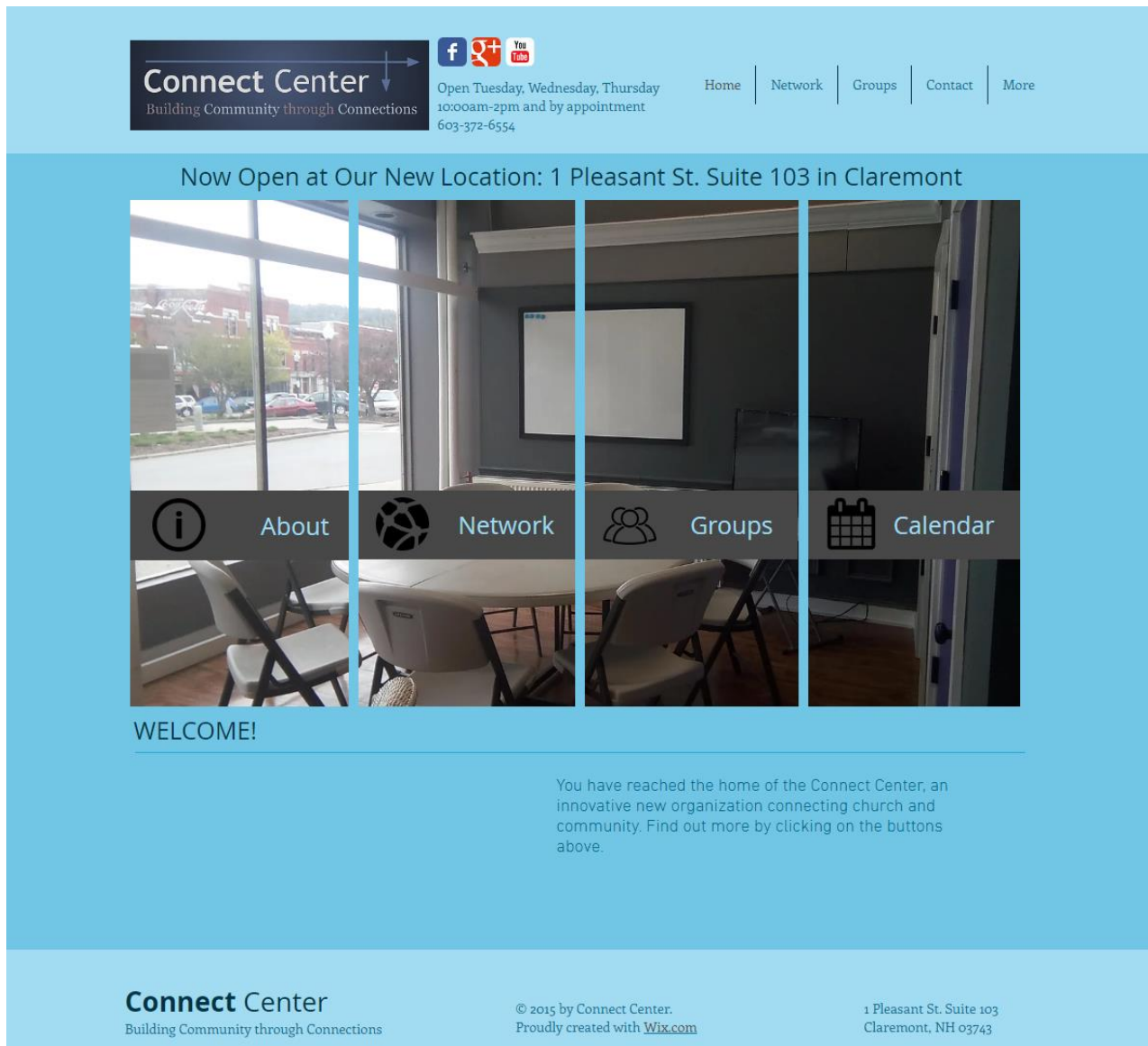
Church Leader Questions

1. How much growth since beginning of your ministry here? What percentage were unchurched? What percentage were de-churched?
2. What approaches have been most effective in reaching the unchurched/de-churched?
3. What approaches have been least effective in reaching the unchurched/de-churched?
4. What obstacles are on the church's side for reaching the culture with the gospel?
5. What obstacles are there on the unchurched side for receiving the gospel?
6. How receptive to the gospel is our area generally? Explain.
7. What do church leaders need to know about reaching people in upper New England?

APPENDIX E

CONNECT CENTER PROMO SAMPLES

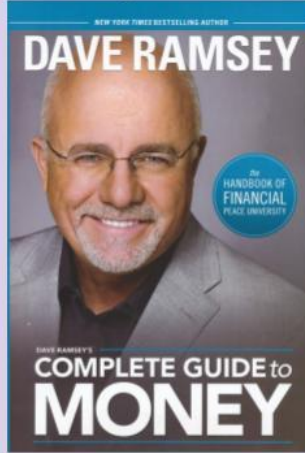
Connect Center website: www.connectcenterclaremont.com



Connect Center

Building Community through Connections

**Mondays at 7pm,
starting October 5th**

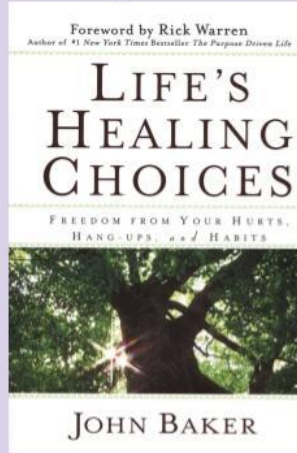


We all need a plan for our money. *Financial Peace University* (FPU) is that plan! It teaches God's ways of handling money. FPU presents biblical, practical steps to get from where you are to where you've dreamed you could be. This plan will show you how to get rid of debt, manage your money, spend and save wisely, and much more! Coordinated by Jim Blundon, Riverstone Church.

Fall Classes at the Connect Center

Sign up online at connectcenterclaremont.com or by calling 603-372-6554

**Tuesdays at 10am,
starting October 6th**

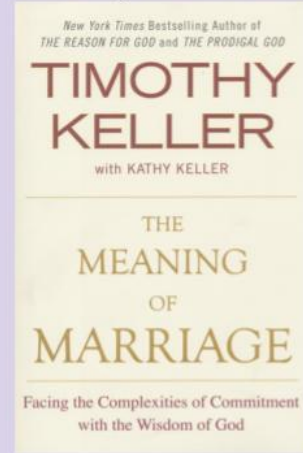


(Women's Group)

Life's Healing Choices offers freedom from our hurts, hang-ups, and habits through eight healing choices that promise true happiness and life transformation. Using the Beatitudes of Jesus as a foundation, Pastors Rick Warren and John Baker developed the eight choices shared in this course. Coordinated by Pam Chute, Lake Sunapee Baptist Church

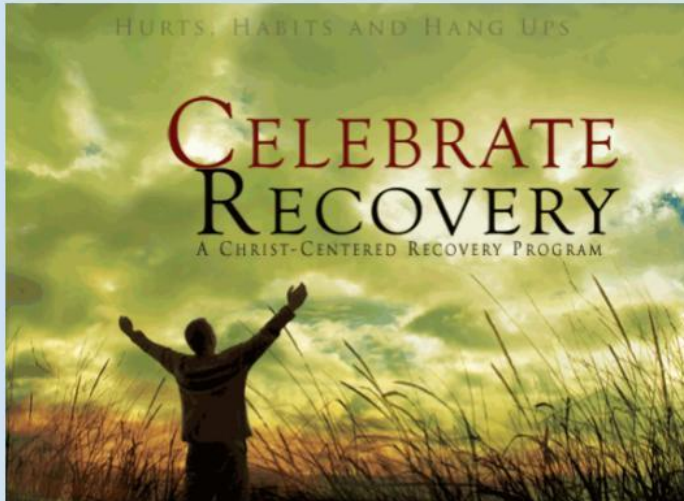
✦ Class coordinators will notify interested individuals and participants about cost of materials

**Saturdays at 7pm,
starting October 10th**



New York Times bestselling author Timothy Keller shows everyone—Christians, skeptics, singles, longtime married couples, and those about to be engaged—the vision of what marriage should be according to the Bible. *The Meaning of Marriage* offers instruction on how to have a successful marriage. Coordinated by Tim Frisch, Calvary Baptist Church.

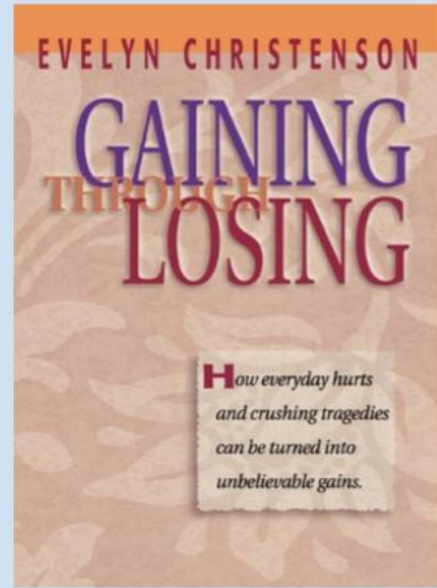
Support Groups



Thursdays at Lake Sunapee Baptist Church
6:00pm–8:00pm
21 Nutting Rd, Sunapee, New Hampshire
Call (603) 203-9497 for more details.

Bereavement Support Group

10am, Thursdays at the Connect Center
7 weeks, starting September 17th
Call (603) 372-6554 for more details



* Group facilitators will notify interested individuals and participants about cost of materials



46 Opera House Square in Claremont
Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
10am-2pm and by appointment
603-372-6554

Classes and Support Groups

E-mail connectcenterclaremont@gmail.com or call
603-372-6554 to sign up for a class or support group

The local churches in our network offer classes and support groups. Below are some of the current and upcoming opportunities.

At Riverstone Church
Tuesdays at 6:00pm

The advertisement for 'Celebrate Recovery' features a person with their arms raised in a gesture of praise or triumph, standing on a beach with the ocean in the background. The text is as follows:

CELEBRATE RECOVERY
A CHRIST-CENTERED RECOVERY PROGRAM

Located at Riverstone Church
739 Main St. in Claremont, NH

HELPING PEOPLE OVERCOME LIFE'S
HURTS, HANG-UPS AND HABITS

Call 542-0460 for more info

Hosted by Calvary Baptist Church
Call 372-6554 for more info

The advertisement for 'Financial Peace University' features a person jumping in the air against a blue sky with a green field at the bottom. The text is as follows:

Dave Ramsey's
Financial Peace
UNIVERSITY

IMAGINE YOURSELF
DEBT FREE

CLASS STARTS SOON!

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VITA

Full name: Timothy Wayne Frisch

Date and place of birth: July 1, 1979 in Trenton, NJ

Education/Degrees: B.A. Biblical Studies, Baptist Bible College East, Boston, MA, 2001

M.Div., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, 2011

Years of D.Min. Work: 2015–2020

Expected Graduation: May 2020